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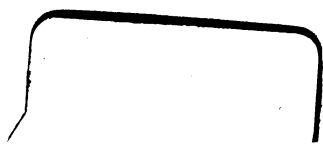
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JULIAN THE APOSTATE

AND

THE DUKE OF MERCIA

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AND

THE DUKE OF MERCIA

HISTORICAL DRAMAS

BY THE LATE

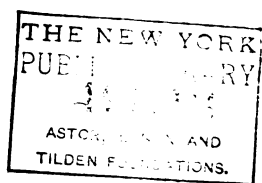
SIR AUBREY DE VERE



LONDON

BASIL M. PICKERING


1858



ADVERTISEMENT.

JULIAN the Apostate was originally published in the year 1822, and the Duke of Mercia in the year 1823. They are now republished, after having been many years out of print.

P R E F A C E.

IR AUBREY DE VERE was born at Currah Chase, in the county of Limerick, on the 28th of August, 1788. He received his school education at Harrow, where he was the contemporary of Lord Byron and Sir Robert Peel. On the 12th of May, 1807, he married Mary, eldest daughter of Stephen Edward Rice, Esq. and sister of Lord Monteagle, his enduring affection for whom exceeded that which commonly unites brothers, and constituted the great friendship of his life. In his boyhood he had been placed at Amble-side, under the care of a private tutor, the Rev. John Dawes; and the beautiful scenery of the lake country, his visits to which were among the happiest incidents of his maturer years, early taught him that appreciation of Nature which marked his poetry at a time when the power of describing natural beauty with truth

and freedom were less valued than they have been in later days. Walking, after the lapse of forty years, beside one of the clear streams of that country, he recognized with delight the rock from which he had first cast his line into the water. A scene once beheld, indeed, he never forgot: and, as was remarked by a painter, it might have been delineated from his description. Of this faculty his Sonnets on Castleconnel, Adare, Kilmallock, and Cashel, are illustrations, as well as many other Sonnets written at later periods, while sitting amid the ruined abbeys, or wandering beside the iron-bound coast of his native land. The Sonnet was with him a favourite form of composition: he was attracted to it by its majestic completeness, its severity, and perhaps by its difficulty. This taste was fostered by the noble Sonnets of Wordsworth, whose genius he had hailed from the first, and whose friendship he regarded as one of the chief honours of his life. For his earlier Sonnets he found a model chiefly in the Italian Poets, especially Petrarch and Filicaja. Like Filicaja also, who so well deserved the inscription graven on his tomb, "*qui gloriam literarum honestavit*," he valued the Sonnet chiefly because the auste-

city of its brief and pregnant form fits it in a peculiar sense for the loftier themes of song.

The truthfulness of his poetry will be best understood by those who knew its author best. None of his poems are more marked by it than the Sonnets which record, with a manly pathos, his devotion to those linked to him by domestic bonds, or by early association;—some early removed, and one his survivor for nearly ten years. It was as an expression of our spiritual and intellectual being that he chiefly revered poetry; and an unusual proportion of his works is an utterance of the writer's convictions and sympathies, religious, moral, and political. His "Historical Sonnets" were inspired by a deeply-rooted chivalrous sentiment, by his respect for monarchical and ecclesiastical institutions, and by his reverence for the past; but they illustrate not less forcibly the compatibility of the most zealous loyalty with a genuine love of liberty, and breathe the spirit of an age when no one supposed the regal and the popular principles to be at variance, and when nobility stood remote from exclusiveness. Many of the Political Sonnets, such as those on the "Battle of Waterloo," the "Death of the Princess Charlotte,"

the "Liberty of the Press," and the "Basis of Power," rose out of contemporary events; and his especial attachment to the country of his birth, for the religious freedom of which he had early contended, and with the honour and interests of which he deemed those of the British Empire to be inseparably entwined, found an expression in his "Lamentation of Ireland." "Julian the Apostate" was published in 1822, and dedicated to the Earl of Limerick, brother of his mother, to whom he was profoundly attached, and who had resided with him during the years of her widowhood. In 1823 the "Duke of Mercia" appeared, a drama, the form of which was suggested by the old Chronicle Plays.

Sir Aubrey de Vere published nothing more, with the exception of a few translations from the Italian and the Greek, till the year 1842, when the "Song of Faith" appeared. The cause of this long silence is to be found partly in his singular modesty, partly in the duties which belong to a country gentleman and resident proprietor, and partly in the fact that his mind found sufficient to occupy, though not to engross it, in superintending the education of his children, in the formation of a good library, and in

the cultivation of the Fine Arts, his attention to which was not diminished by the seclusion in which he lived. In his hands, indeed, the adornment of his family residence became one of the Fine Arts, and was carried out with the eye of a painter. The love of fame was not one of his more urgent affections, though he was not without a natural desire to illustrate his name. His reading, moreover, was discursive, military works interesting him not less than poetry, or history. From his boyhood he had approached military subjects with the ardour of a soldier, studying campaigns, ancient and modern, with the aid of maps as well as books, a habit to which he probably owed his minute geographical knowledge, and a singular power of realizing, as a tactician might, the relative position of remote places. Probably not more than ten or twelve months of his life, scattered over its various portions, were spent in the composition of his larger works ; but when he wrote, it was with rapidity though with the conscientious carefulness of a scholar likewise. His most considerable work, "Mary Tudor," was his latest. He had early been struck by the special aptitude of its principal character for dramatic purposes. Accident

had prevented him on various occasions from proceeding with the subject; but the fulfilment of his early intention, and the impartial delineation of a character the finer traits of which had early vanished from the popular tradition, though they have been preserved by history, he regarded as the discharge of a debt. The drama was written during the years 1844-5, in intervals of severe illness, and published after his death. He died at Currah Chase, on the 28th of July, 1846, in the 58th year of his age.

JULIAN, THE APOSTATE.

INTRODUCTION.

THE House of Constantine gave eleven Sovereigns (including the associate Cæsars) to the Roman Empire, and terminated with Julian the Apostate. Its greatness was sullied by domestic crimes, which gradually produced its extinction.

Julian, and his elder brother Gallus, were the offspring of Julius Constantius, the patrician, brother to Constantine the Great; and were withdrawn from successive proscriptions, so fatal to the imperial race, by the efforts of Mark, bishop of Arethusa—a service but ill requited in after-days.

The brothers were eventually adopted by their uncle, the Emperor Constantius, at the instance of his wife, Eusebia—a woman gifted with many noble qualities. It was vainly, and perhaps absurdly, hoped, that the youths would, in the enjoyment of Imperial favour, forget the wrongs of their family, and the death of their father, who had perished by the hands of an assassin.

Gallus was created Cæsar, and was united in marriage to a sister of the Emperor. He speedily fell a victim to his own folly and the unruly passions of his wife; not long surviving the suspicions of a sovereign never appeased without blood.

Julian succeeded to the vacant dignity, apparently ill-suited to habits formed in the schools, and on which courtiers and philosophers pronounced widely differing opinions. At Athens his education was completed, and his proficiency in all mental accomplishments gave proof of genius and unwearied perseverance.

Among the philosophers with whom he there became intimate, Maximus obtained the chief hold of his affections, and established a decided influence over his imagination. Under his tuition, doubts of the truth of that religion in which he had been early trained, were artfully suggested. It was the faith of his household oppressors, and gradually gave place to the seductive delusions of pagan worship, in a mind dangerously gifted with an irregular enthusiasm. At length he was allowed to participate in the Eleusinian mysteries; when, it is asserted, he consented to his uncle's death:—an act suitable to his vengeance and to his ambition, and the appropriate consummation of his apostacy. At this period my drama commences, for I have

not dared to detail in language the progress of impiety, or to array the arguments that seduced a Christian from his God.

Julian had been invested by Constantius with the sovereignty in Gaul: a splendid but difficult command, in the course of which an unexpected military genius developed itself. At the moment of his colleague's reverses in the East, *he* was victorious in the West. Thus the advancement of his reputation became a source of contrast and the foundation of jealousy: add, too, that as the idol of the army he was dangerous. His humiliation was decreed; and the very moment of triumph was rashly selected to separate a general from troops that adored him, and to tear those troops from the scene of their successes, in order to recruit a distant and a disgraced army.

These were mandates dangerous to resist, but fatal perhaps to obey. The army of Gaul regarded them as a violation of its compact of service, and was probably not ill prepared for a crisis. A tumultuous assembly of the soldiers pronounced the reign of Constantius at an end, and hastily invested Julian with the Imperial titles. At a critical moment Constantius died, and his nephew ascended the throne, now his by the undisputed right of succession.

Julian, with all his faults, was unquestionably

a great man, and, though an Apostate, possessed many noble qualities. No man had warmer partisans or severer enemies; consequently no one has been more variously represented. His vengeance was not unnatural in times of extreme peril, of unbridled passion, and bloody precedent; and his apostacy, real or affected, placed him at the head of a party panting for change. As to his real creed, it is difficult to imagine a man surrendering his senses to the delusions of the pagan mythology, yet the fact is not impossible. I am disposed to regard him as, at heart, a deist; making use of popular superstitions for the attainment of political objects.

In the following drama I have not sought to observe the unities. It would be alike presumptuous in me to plead the example of our great national school, or to argue a point on which the best critics are at variance. It, however, does appear to me sufficient for dramatic purposes to connect, in a consecutive chain of action, visible effects derived from intelligible causes. That I have failed in accomplishing my own ideas is a fact I cannot hide from myself; but the present is a first effort, and may, I would hope, lead to better things.

A. DE V.

*Conclusion of the Life of Julian, from "Speed's
Historie." Edit. 1632.*

"But now one errour, his apostacie, disroabing him of all his morall vertues, leaves him an object naked to the vulgar eie, but a monster of men, and marke of infumie. I holde it therefore fitting no lesse the use, than the justice, of a story, to doe him (as I have done) all his right: since in him we learne thatt all those admirable endowments of nature, embellished with all the morall and internall graces that art could adde, are not the base of holinesse, without divine grace: nor dalliaunce of fortune and fullnesse of empire (that made this man wanton and forgettfull) is the center of security and happinesse, without heavenly protection: since from the sense of sacred piety hee fell to pagan superstition: for many are called, but few are chosen; and in the seat of Presumptuous Majesty hee felt the rod of Divine Revenge."

!

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

JULIAN.

MAXIMUS, *Chief Priest.*

NEVITTA, *General of the Gauls.*

SALLUST, *Prefect of the East.*

ANATOLIUS, *Master of the Palace.*

JOVIAN:

MARK, *Bishop of Arethusa.*

HORMISDAS, *an exiled Persian Prince.*

SAPOR, *King of Persia.*

MERANES, }
NOHORDATES, } *Persian Generals.*

EUSEBIA, *Widow of the Emperor Constantius.*

CONSTANTIA HELENA, *Wife of Julian, sister of Constantius.*

VIRGILIA.

Roman and Persian Officers. Priests of Eleusis.

Priests of Mars. Ladies of the Court, &c.



JULIAN, THE APOSTATE.

Interior of the Cavern of Eleusis.—Night.

JULIAN.



H, ye mysterious and invisible beings
That throng this palpable darkness,
and do give
These tombs of earth awful vitality!
I hear the rushing of your viewless wings
Sweep, with an unimaginable speed,
Around this mortal substance! Vault of dark-
ness,
Thou gloomy mother of all hideous shadows,
Thy void is pregnant with a phantom life;
Thy vast receptacles are filled with breathings,
Cold expirations, that stir up my hair
And cling to my damp forehead. Haply I stand

B

Within the portal of Eternity,
Amid death's heavy atmosphere—enviored
By th' incorporeal essence of past life,
And souls that wait their advent! Awful beings!
Impetuous and incessant travellers!
Swift couriers of two worlds! Connecting stream
'Twixt corruptible man and the pure Gods!
Here I confront you—firm, yet not unmoved.
Oh, ye inscrutable company, vast tide
Of spirits, in your mighty ebb and flow,
Here, in the midst of you I stand, and shrink
not!

*Enter MAXIMUS behind, in his sacerdotal vestments,
and stands some time contemplating JULIAN.*

MAXIMUS.

Julian!

JULIAN (*with a start*).
Who calls?

MAXIMUS.

Julian!

JULIAN.

Or man, or spirit,
I answer thee! Behold me here—behold me!
Ha! art *thou* there, Maximus? 'Twas startling
To hear thy sudden voice in such a place—

A voice too, such as thine, caught by the echoes
That have their dwelling 'neath these arched
 roofs

And long evolving chambers. I was musing
On things that are not of this world : aye, dally-
 ing

With dreams that others shrink from ;—com-
 muning

With disembodied Nature, in her den
Of lonely desolation, silent and dark.

I am not sorry, Man, to see thee here ;
Thou hast left me to unwelcome company,
My own poor thoughts.

MAXIMUS.

Lord Julian, I have prayed
In thy behalf with fervour, that hath power
To reach the ear of Heaven—zeal that controlleth
The world of spirits. A deep trance came o'er
 me

Beneath the altar of great Cybele.

I saw the Berecynthian Mother rise

Awful before me : her habiliments

As in the Phidian marble : crowned with towers,

The Lion-drawn stood in her brazen chariot.

What passed I may not tell thee. The bright
 veil

That shrouds those forms ineffable no hand
Of mortal mould may raise.

JULIAN.

Old Maximus,

I reverence much thy character, and gaze
Upon thy countenance and ethereal eye,
As on a page where holiest things are writ,
As on a beacon whence the light of Heaven
Looks out. I've heard from thee, doctrine beyond

The ken of common minds, and do believe
Have hearkened with intelligence. I came
To be resolved on matters of high import,
And will not now depart unsatisfied.
Lead on!

MAXIMUS.

Oh, worthy of thy destinies!

Canst thou with heart undaunted, brain unseared,
Peruse the mystic leaves, wherein are graven
The lessons of eternity? Canst thou behold
The presence and the glory, nor dissolve
Like Semele?

JULIAN.

My heart is firm:—

There's nought within the compass of humanity
But I would dare and do.

MAXIMUS.

Nay, pause, reflect—

I would not lead aught of mere earthly dross
Into our hidden shrine and sanctuary.
Once there, thou art no longer man. The cloak
Of human thoughts and passions must fall from
thee:

Thou must decay, to be reanimate
With fires of loftier life. Thou must transmute
Thy baser mould to a more noble metal—
Ore more divine. Thy soul then must imbibe
The light, and take the stamp of fate, and be
Her minister, albeit of good or evil ;
Her delegate, to execute or die !

JULIAN.

I am resolved.

MAXIMUS.

Then follow me.

*Interior of the Cavern, hung with stalactites, &c.
&c. At the extremity an Altar, on which lies a
scroll. Two Priests standing on each side.*

Enter JULIAN and MAXIMUS.

JULIAN.

This silence, and these shadows, and cool air,
Impress the heart with reverence. The calm
Simplicity and the majestic repose
Of these eternal chambers, at the root
Of mortal habitation, that regard not
Time, but exist as if time had no lapse,
Do fill the mind with awe, and hold the senses
More anchored in the placid calm of faith,
And unresisting fealty to Heaven,
Than the more gorgeous fanes of upper air ;
The monumental temples and proud palaces,
Where, on her throne of clay, sits militant
Awful Religion !

MAXIMUS.

Tread softly and with reverence. We are now
Before a present Deity. These halls
Are unprofaned with human workmanship :
All that thou see'st—those fretted roofs high
arching

From their vast pillars, those broad coigns and
friezes,
And sculptured pomp grotesque, and marble
floors,
And roofs of pendulous chrystal :—these are all
Nature's primeval architecture.

JULIAN.

Gods !

How glorious are ye in your earthly dwelling !
Here let me kneel !

MAXIMUS.

Julian, dost thou believe
The mystery of that world of spirits divine,
The everlasting conclave, who sit throned
In Heaven, and rule the air and earth and waters ;
Aye, and the penal caverns of deep Hell ?
The sublimated essences, whence man
Takes his mixed character of good and evil :
Imperfect 'midst perfection ?

JULIAN.

Pray you, pardon me :

My soul is like a steed in act to spring—
Hot expectation swelling every vein,
The course before him and the goal in sight.
This is no place to lecture points abstruse ;
I stand at gaze. Who shall withhold me ?

MAXIMUS.

Boy!

Thy mettle shall be tried. Who slew thy father?
Knock at thy heart and ask what Vengeance says.
Is there no name stored in its inmost core—
No execrated memory that smoulders,
Like a pent flame, within thy seething brain?
The book of fate lies open to thee.—Read.
Thy glory and Heaven's will, vindictive dæmons
Therein have graved in bloody characters!
Ha! does the light beam on thee? Thou art
 busy
Now with ten thousand thronging thoughts, dim
 gliding
Before the glass of apt imagination.
Do'st start?

JULIAN.

Thy dark surmises make the blood
Rush reflux to my heart. Shuddering I hear.
No, not for empires! But, go on—

MAXIMUS.

'Twere vain.

Those prodigies, those mysteries, those omens,
That should have nerved, have daunted thee.

Away,

Thou art unworthy!

JULIAN.

Art thou mad? unworthy!

Oh, yes! most weak, most impotent, to stand
Thus parleying with dishonour!

MAXIMUS.

Be it so—

Then dietheslave thou art. Nay, frown not on me.

I am an old man, and am sick of life:

My country was my all: she is betrayed;

And gladly would I die upon her bosom,

Kissing the wounds her worthless sons have made.

Yet had I hoped, oh! Julian, thou wert the stem,

To whose precocious growth and branching

vigour,

I, and some millions of despairing souls,

(Now withering in the tempest of bad times)

Have long looked up for shelter. Thou wert

the bow

Arching in beauty o'er our sullen skies—

The little cloud upon the desert's edge,

Feeding our faintness with fore-tasted showers.

But now—come, come, we'll talk no more on't.

Well,

Go, stagnate in thy apathy. My lot

Is cast for death: *I* cannot sit beneath

The poison-tree and live.

JULIAN.

Is there no way,
No unpolluted pass, to Fame, unpaved
With human bones?

MAXIMUS.

Too scrupulous boy! Thou hast bruised the
serpent's tail,
And wilt thou spare his head to bite thee? Fie!
Thou art a feeble reasoner. The tree,
Whence all our sprouting woes rankly have
sprung,
Must be uprooted. It were vain to prune
The branches, when the stem is in its prime,
And the root vigorous.

JULIAN.

I would have mercy,
That, like the sweet bird in the depth of oaks,
Hath dwelling in heroic hearts.

MAXIMUS.

No doubt.
Yet mercy oft hath but a feeble judgment.
I would not kill, but execute. Remember,
Crime makes the felon, and pronounces that
Which else were murder, expiation.
Evil and good cannot be co-existent.
But your mind wanders from me.

JULIAN.

Nay, I listen

With a most rapt attention.

MAXIMUS.

Why should he live?

They, who would wish him well, should wish
him dead,

Not as a King, but an undoubted Tyrant ;
Not as his brow usurps another's crown,
(And that it does, thou art a living witness,)
But that his evil passions do pervert
Heaven's attributes, and his accursed deeds
Soil his else god-like presence with the stain
Of earth, and leave him the vile slave of guilt.
His death will be th' acquittance of our wrongs ;
The balance of much evil: to it men look
For their withheld inheritance—as robbed heirs
Towards unjust guardians. Now, but a thread
upholds

The axe of justice over him: who cuts it
Shall be his country's saviour. Thus did Brutus,
Even on the blood that sprung from his own
veins,

Execute justice: when his country's good
Demanded the great sacrifice, he made it.
So shouldst thou too be honoured.

JULIAN.

My chafed spirit
Hath dallied with such thoughts: too deeply
 plunged
In the vague abyss of thy dark counsels.

MAXIMUS.

Why should he wish to live? He will be happier
In the sealed chambers of the silent tomb,
Than on a sapped and tottering throne; 'mid
 guards,
Whose fawning knees and sycophantic tongues
Stir thoughts of bloody treason. Now, he dies
The death by inches—every hour brings with it
The anticipated torture. He regards
All seasons, and all places, and all men
With undisguised and irrepressible horror.
There's suffocation for his bed, swift arrows
For his high throne of grandeur, sudden daggers
In his close walks, and poison at his board.
Where'er he moves destruction follows him,
A blood-hound on his track, and keen Dismay
With her hawk's wing o'ershadows him. I tell
 thee
He will be better in the grave: the curses
That shall accompany his obsequies
Will find no echo in the house of death—

His clay will be as callous to our strokes
As now his evil heart is to our prayers.
We shall look round for once, and say, where is
 he?
And then forget for ever !

JULIAN.

How tuneably
My soul, like a touched instrument, responds
Beneath thy master-hand ! Aye, I have shaken
Allegiance from my heart ; but, Maximus,
He is my blood—'twere parricide !

MAXIMUS.

Oh, Thou
Great Spirit, that do'st haunt these sacred caves,
And fillest with vengeance my unshrinking
 soul,
Even as a sacrificial cup with blood, deign visit
His fainting resolution ; and light up
His veins and vaulting mind with thine own
 lightning.
Julian ! must all our wrongs die unrevenged ?
What, in the very presence of the Gods,
Wilt thou renounce their delegation ? Go !
Go, bind the chains thou'st sworn to sever ! Go,
Fawn at the despot's footstool ! Supplicate
Pardon, and say, " Behold thine enemies ! "

There is no middle course. Thy steps must
mount

On his neck, or on ours ; or, failing both,
Die, like thy father, and be so forgotten.
Ah ! art thou moved ? that name hath stirred
thee up

With memory of intolerable wrong.
Think of his bleeding corpse, crushed by that boar
That broke into his vineyard and assailed him,
Even as he sat in sunny confidence
In the sweet garden of his family ;
With all his flowers around him, and no thought
But of domestic love and privacy.
Behold his spouting wounds, his dying eyes,
His moving, voiceless lips : thy maddening
mother

With her fixed look : the murderer o'er his prey,
And turning from his victim and his vengeance
With the cold languor of satiety.
Think on it all—and thou, like Hannibal,
Lifting thy little hands, vowing revenge !

JULIAN (*walking aside with agitation*).

Just Gods ! Just Gods !

MAXIMUS.

Ay call, and they shall answer thee.
All laws of God, of Nature, and of Nations

Devote such, like the savage beasts of prey,
At any time, by every hand to perish !

JULIAN.

Oh ! that the curse that strangles at my heart,
Might find a voice and die not ! Oh, that the
fury,

That maddens in my pulses and my brain,
Could take a palpable form, a vital nerve,
To tread him down and stamp him into dust !

MAXIMUS (*aside*).

Hot spirit, art thou roused ? Now be thy ven-
geance

Pander to cloaked ambition, and so work
The unseen will that rules thee !

JULIAN.

May all the pangs
Of dying guilt, anticipating Hell,
Glare on his tossing slumbers, and tear out
Rest from his eyes, till madness sears his brain,
And preys upon the ashes of his heart !
Oh ! when he dies, may the infernal fiends
Smile hideous from the dim depths of his
chamber
Upon his eye, when coming Death hath purged
it—

May no sweet thought of recollected good

Slake his last burning thirst ; but thronging
visions

Of terrible conscience scare him ! Hear me !
hear me !

[*During the latter part of this speech, the Priests
bring forward the Altar and the parch-
ment, upon a signal from MAXIMUS.*

MAXIMUS.

Thou art thyself again ! Now, Julian, now,
While the divine wrath triumphs in thy veins,
Be thy great curse accomplished. Take this pen ;
His fate is in this scroll—sign, and he dies !

[*JULIAN eagerly signs. MAXIMUS gives the
paper to a Priest, who departs with it
instantly.*

MAXIMUS.

Now are the gods of Rome avenged ! Con-
stantius,

Thy hours are numbered—these few lines have
slain thee.

Thou art arraigned and judged ! Thy power
gone by,

As a forgotten storm ! Thou wert, and art not !

[*Turning to JULIAN, who appears agitated.*

But how is this, my sov'reign ? Why dost thou
look

So pallid, and thus gaze on vacant air?
Thy foot is in the flood—fear not to trust
'Thy bark upon the mountain wave ; 'twill bear
 thee,
With thy magnificent freightage, to fair shores
And happy harbours. Fear it not.

JULIAN.

I fear!

It is a word unwritten in my heart!
But something—(a delusion of the brain)
Something hath shook me. As I signed just now,
A form of mild and melancholy beauty
Stood by my side and frowned. When I had
 signed,
I looked—the place was void ! I do believe
That shape my guardian spirit and good genius ;
And that he hath passed from me !

MAXIMUS.

 Pshaw ! such dreams
Are all unworthy of thy manhood. Let us
Return from these deep vaults to the pure air :
The uncertain flicker of our torches gives
A body to these vapours, and creates
Shadows like substances. We'll think not on
 them.

Now, champion of the gods, attend me. Now

Thou art worthy of the deep and awful rites
That veil our Eleusinian mysteries.
Knowledge and power—the future and the past
Are henceforth thine. One hour, and thou shalt
quaff
Deep from the cup of immortality! [*Exeunt.*

Camp in Gaul.

MUTIUS and other Soldiers.

MUTIUS.

Heard you the news?

SOLDIER.

No, what is't?

MUTIUS.

Heard you not?

You should know then; and every man, me-
thinks,

Who boasts the name of Roman or of soldier,
Should have his heart in mutiny.

2ND SOLDIER.

Ay, Mutius?

Why, what's the matter now, man? There is not
A rumour, on its swallow wing, that flits
About our summer camp, but you attend
Its idle flight.

3RD SOLDIER.

'Tis true, your mouth is ever
The herald of bad tidings. Scarce a week
Has passed since thou didst tell a ghastly tale
Of pillage, rape, and murder: some wild tribe,
Some locust horde of Belgians, that thou saidst
Had swam the Rhine at night, and like a tempest
Swept in our rear. Oh! 'twas most circum-
stantial.
Shame! shame!

MUTIUS.

Kind Sirs, have mercy. I confess
Sometimes too zealously I do interpret
Rumours that lack precision, and have been
To fame a hasty midwife; but just now
The jade hath brought a brat forth, whose shrill
cry
Will fill the world with wailing yet.

1ST SOLDIER.

Nay, Mutius;
Thou hast a quick ear and a ready tongue,
Prithee expound. What is the news?

MUTIUS.

No matter:
I'm but an idle loiterer at the skirts
Of rumour, the mere mouth-piece of false fame.

I'll not disturb your equanimity
With my vain breath.

2ND SOLDIER.

Good Mutius, think not so.

In truth we meant no imputation :
'Twas but the jesting of good fellowship.

MUTIUS.

Methinks you love the Cæsar?

1ST SOLDIER.

Ay, Heaven guard him !

MUTIUS.

I take it too, that he acquits his debt
Of love to you with interest. He pays back
Your service with good deeds, and deals to all
The glory he but shares.

SOLDIERS.

Ay, bless him ! bless him !

MUTIUS.

Why have you left your homes, your bridal beds,
The hearths on which you played in infancy ?
Your vineyards are unpruned, your leas un-
ploughed,
Your pastures run to waste. Your wives sit
weeping
'Neath the neglected porch, and watch in vain
The wished return, till they are sick with longing.

Why have ye *not* returned? Did you not promise,
When you had chased the spoiler from your gates,
When you had freed your country (as you have done
Beneath his glorious guidance), did you not promise
Back to return in triumph and in peace?

SOLDIERS.

'Twas our assurance.

MUTIUS.

Ye are trusty fools.

Go to—we are betrayed. Cæsar and people.

SOLDIERS (*tumultuously*).

Betrayed? speak out, speak out!

MUTIUS.

Ay, that I will.

There is an old man on a tottering throne,
An Emperor in the east, who thinks our lives
here

Too much secluded; we must see the world;
And, at his will, track half its zone, to make
Acquaintance with the bears of Caucasus.

SOLDIERS (*tumultuously*).

1st. 'Tis false, he dare not do it.

2nd. We would not go.

3rd. By Hercules, I would not move a foot.

4th. Nay, we would march with arms in our
good hands.

1st. Our contract's broke.

2nd. 'Tis manifest.

1st. Let's run

To our good Cæsar's tent and ask redress.

MUTIUS.

'Twere vain. We have seen him lately as a man
Fretted by some immedicable ill,

Worn down by care. He hath estranged himself
From all old haunts, custom'd society.

And whence is this? Say, they break faith with us,
Then are they false to him. If they forget
Our service, they neglect his fame and blight
His honour. We are linked by fate : our sacrifice
Unites him as a victim.

1ST SOLDIER. Haste to the Cæsar.
We'll know the worst at once.

2nd. We're but the sport
Of women and smooth eunuchs.

3rd. 'Twere as well
To owe allegiance to the Antipodes!

1st. Would that our own brave Julian were
our Emperor!

2nd. Huzza, huzza! 'Tis a brave thought!

3rd.

Away!

Run and salute him at his tent.

[*Exeunt.*]

Interior of JULIAN'S tent.

JULIAN on a couch in the back ground.

Enter MAXIMUS.

MAXIMUS (*gazes some time on JULIAN*).

O paltry human nature! What, must I mount
By such poor things as these? Thou woman-
hearted!

Thy veins run milk—not blood. Would 'twere
slow poison,

So might'st thou be short prologue to my drama!
Shrink'st thou from crimes that other hands
commit?

Ere I have done with thee, thy soul shall drink
Deep of that draught! Thy lips shall smack of
blood!

That hand shall smell of slaughter! that weak
heart

Pant in the chains of an evil conscience!

Oh! I shall link thee with the dæmons yet,
And make thee all infernal! What if he fail?
What if I lose this goodly stake? Why then,

On earth, in Hell, thou shalt partake perdition.

[*Aloud.*

Lord Julian! be a man; awake, arise!

[*JULIAN slowly raises himself on his elbow, surveys MAXIMUS, waves him to depart, and sinks down again.*

MAXIMUS.

How shall we rouse him from this lethargy?

The tide of opportunity ebbs quickly.

Who waits there? Ho! [*Enter a Soldier.*

Know'st thou the Lord Nevitta?

SOLDIER.

Ay, my good Lord.

MAXIMUS.

The Cæsar needs his presence.

[*Exit Soldier.*

My plot hath been well weighed, well timed,
and hath

Conspiring agents in thy breast, Constantius.

But, ere thou diest, thy own rash choice must
give

A colourable motive and just purpose

To such bold actions. Thus we reconcile,

Ay league, opinion to our enterprise.

Enter NEVITTA.

Nevitta, brave Nevitta! souls like thine

Spurn the delays of cautious policy.
In truth it irketh me too. But, Nevitta,
Lives must be spared : we shed no innocent
blood ;
And therefore plot before we strike.

NEVITTA.

Good Priest,
I am a soldier, rough of soul and limb,
And, in a good cause, care not where I strike.
The skilful leech spares not his probe.

MAXIMUS.

'Tis true.
And yet, we must be scrupulous, if only
For virtue's sake ; nor incompatible
With valour and the law of soldiership :
And therefore have we plotted ere we strike.
The messengers from that poor cozened fool
Constantius must arrive soon. That will rouse
Our splenetic warrior there. But, my Nevitta,
Hast thou sent airy Fame forth through our
camp
To blow strange rumours in affrighted ears ?

NEVITTA.

Even so : a trusty representative ;
A tall, gaunt soldier, with a querulous eye,
That ever spies round discontentedly ;

Restless of limb, and restless in his tongue :
A man too modest for the naked truth.
In short, a very poet, who can make
Marvels seem facts, and all facts marvellous.

MAXIMUS.

Right, right. This sows the seeds of discontent
Coming events shall ripen. What's his name?

NEVITTA.

An old centurion, Mutius.

MAXIMUS.

'Tis well.

Enter an OFFICER.

How goes the camp? Thy steps are hasty.

OFFICER.

Sir,

A sudden mutiny has ta'en men's minds,
I know not wherefore.

MAXIMUS.

Well, we have heard some rumour ;
What hast thou seen, what heard?

OFFICER.

Some, with wild cries,
Run to their arms ; some, like men roused from
sleep,
Half-naked, spring on their unharnessed horses:
Here's one, on the sudden snatches a trumpet up,

And sends a dissonant blast through its hoarse
throat,

Then bellows 'Treason.' There, on a heap of
armour,

With looks of lean dismay, a night-worn sentinel
Limps up and plays the demagogue, thick crowds
Hemming him round with their up-gaping faces.

MAXIMUS.

Hear'st thou, Nevitta? Thou hast loosed a mad
dog

Amongst our sober legion'ries.

NEVITTA.

Brave Mutius!

It is in truth a cunning hound, and keen too;
No nose like his to hunt a cool scent up;
He hath the natural aptitude.

Enter another OFFICER.

2ND OFFICER.

My Lords,

The camp is all in motion: hither tending
Some unexpected pageant. Legates, they say,
From the Emperor.

MAXIMUS.

So soon, so very soon?
The Gods promote our enterprise. Nevitta,
To thy post: be circumspect.

NEVITTA.

I say, be bold.

[*Exeunt* NEVITTA and OFFICERS.]

Enter ANATOLIUS, *introducing* JOVIAN, HORMIS-
DAS, and BISHOP OF ARETHUSA, *as from a*
Journey.

MAXIMUS (*aside*).

True, yet my mind misgives me.

[*Glancing at* JULIAN'S *couch.*

He's not himself now :

These moments are as ages !

[*Aloud, as if on the sudden perceiving them.*

Ha ! dear friends,

Lord Prefect Jovian—Prince Hormisdas.—Thou
too,

Most reverend Mark of Arethusa ! Welcome.
We had some foretaste of your coming : men
Cooped up in idle camps, having quick ears,
Catch the faint echo of approaching footsteps.

JOVIAN.

Thanks, Maximus, and many greetings. Truly,
Our coming seemed to stir men's minds : me-
thought

Your warriors hemmed us in so surlily,
We men of peace half liked it not.

MAXIMUS.

Regard them
As wild beasts—but in bondage: they were beneath
The keeper's eye, and knew it.

MARK.

'Twas our surety.
But say, Sir, is the Prince well?

MAXIMUS.

Holy prelate,
Your presence is a cordial which he needs.
Doubtless ye come kind messengers; and trust
me,
'Tis best so: he's much changed. But pardon me,
Your presence comes so gratefully upon us,
Cheering our faintness like a spring i' th' desert,
That I forget my duties, and postpone
My customary loyal thoughts to courtesy.
How is my much-loved and imperial Master?

JOVIAN.

Well—yet not well: and, Maximus, it grieves me
To see the Cæsar thus: much do I fear
My errand—

MAXIMUS.

Soft, 'tis right he be apprised
(And quickly, or he'll chafe else) of your mission.

Excuse me, Sirs. [*He approaches JULIAN's couch.*
My Lord! Here's news of one
You *value* much, Constantius.

JULIAN (*starting up violently*).

Say'st thou so?

Is the deed done? Let's see thy hands: they
have

No stain: they want the livery of slaughter.
Go, go. Thou temptest me, I am a man yet,
A slave—but yet a man, a guiltless man!

MAXIMUS.

My Lord, you do mistake.

JULIAN.

Ay, 'tis gone forth,
The fiat, and the deed of wickedness
Hath had its consummation in the will!
Oh, that the thoughts were sealed, or had no
record!

MAXIMUS.

Sir, this is not a time for idle qualms;
Arouse your mind. Behold what eyes are on
you.

JULIAN (*stepping fiercely forward*).

Whom have we here unbidden? I did abjure
The presence of my species. I have no kindred
Feeling with any of your race: my heart

Dwells lonely in its scorn of earth and man :
Why am I thus intruded on? Away !

MARK.

Julian,

Not all ignoble pilgrims, to a shrine
Of many noble attributes we journey
On a forced errand.

JULIAN.

Ha ! what voice is that ?

It hath the spell of oracles ; it wakes
The murmurs of departed memory
Within my anxious brain ! Thou good old man,
What dost thou here ? Alas, this is no home
For piety and virtue. Why art thou here ?
Eyes should not meet, when hearts are far
asunder.

MAXIMUS (*aside*).

This must not be : there's danger in these
thoughts.—

My Lords, our conference must close. Some
rumours

Have got into this busy heart, our camp,
Doubtless of weak invention, yet sufficing
To peril the realm's peace. Ambassadors,
You may perhaps appease this troubled spirit.

*Enter NEVITTA, MUTIUS, and crowd of angry
Soldiers.*

NEVITTA.

I can restrain this mob no longer.
There's not a tuneless throat in our wild army
But clamours for their General. Here they press
Like jackals that do bay the moon.

JULIAN.

Kind friends,

I can appreciate your zeal, and am not
Blind to affection; yet it pains me. Pray you
Rein in your passions with discretion. Men
Who know us not, to such a scene as this
Might give a strange interpretation.
Pray you retire.

1ST SOLDIER. General, you are betrayed.

2nd. They have deceived us, Cæsar.

3rd. What are these men?

1st. What purpose ye?

2nd. (*In an attitude of menace.*) Speak, speak,

or—

JULIAN.

Hold, my friends:

On your allegiance—on your love! Good Jovian,
You hold the clue here. Solve it, I beseech you.

JOVIAN.

Romans, you were not wont to soil your steel
With old men's blood, or trample the white hairs
Of a defenceless veteran in the dust.
If haply I'm a messenger of evil,
(And keep in mind, I'm but a messenger)
Yet, must I shrink back from a solemn duty,
Because the task is perilous? Oh, no!
I fear not, for I know you.

MUTIUS (*from the crowd*).

Worthy Sir,

To the point.

JOVIAN.

Prince Julian, 'tis the imperial will
That you forthwith repair to Thrace ; meanwhile
Those legions too march eastward.

[*Soldiers rush forward, JULIAN throws
himself before JOVIAN.*]

JULIAN.

Touch him not :

Touch him not, Soldiers—he is innocent.
This tent is sacred as the hallowed altar ;
Our presence is a sanctuary.

MUTIUS (*from the crowd, who fall back*).

General,

We must obey you. Yet, by Mars ! no matter——

D

Doubtless you know best: so, fall back, brave
comrades,

Stir not a finger.

1ST SOLDIER. Hark-ye, old man, I would
We had you to ourselves.

2nd. Ay, by the Gods!
We have met, but have not parted.

JULIAN.

Faithful companions——

MUTIUS.

Silence, ye snarling knaves. Have ye no sense?
Our General would be heard.

JULIAN.

Old comrades! hear me.
I have fought too many fields with you, and
braved
Death in too many shapes with you, and tried
Your valour by its true test—mercy; proved
Your faith by patience in adversity;
Your just affection by your firm obedience;
And cannot now mistrust you. See you here
These two old men—(and worthier never yet
Grew grey in their ungrateful country's service)—
Is it their fault their master does a wrong?
Is it their folly that he is not wise?
Must they await the penance of his crime?

No more, no more of this. Already in
Your altered eyes I read your better judgment.
Now let me touch more pressing topics. Here,
In Gaul, our rescued country, a poor remnant,
After much toil, much glory, many dangers,
We rest at last : it was the promised goal
To which we rushed through death. Shall we
resign

Our hopes, renounce our rights, forget our wrongs,
Because an impotent lip beneath a crown
Cries "Be it so." Oh, shall our shattered barks
Drive at the mercy of a man's weak breath?
We, that had looked to dedicate our wounds,
And hang our bruised armour up, proud trophies,
'Neath the dear roofs of our domestic Gods—
What! are *we* doomed to rot piecemeal away
On far Euphrates' marshes? Must *we* whiten
The deserts of Arabia with our bones?
Comrades, 'tis thus the Emperor wills. For me,
Were disobedience death, *I* disobey.

NEVITTA.

[*Stepping forward in front of soldiery.*

Excuse my abrupt speech ; in the name of all
(For I know all ; each individual heart,
Lip, eye, and casual change of countenance,
Have in this bosom true interpreters ;)

I answer. You are our old General,
And we will have no other General.
You are our Sovereign, throned in our strong
hearts,

And we will have no other Sovereign.
As freemen, we reject unlawful bonds ;
As just men, we will not forego our rights ;
As brave men, we will fence them with our
swords.

This is our creed, Sir : this all hearts will ratify :
For this we are prepared to die !

SOLDIERS.

All, all !

MAXIMUS.

My friends, if after words like these, 'twere
prudent

To venture somewhat couched in calmer spirit,
I might perhaps suggest, too much is purposed,
Or else too little done. You have passed the line
Of strict allegiance ; and the penalty
Tyrants have seldom practised to remit.
Think of Coriolanus, and with him
Contrast the Cæsar of the Rubicon.

NEVITTA.

Thanks for the hint, old Maximus ; we have
tried

The water's depth, and we will swim the stream.
Cæsar! our country has been stabbed through us;
Be thou the healer of our wounds.

MUTIUS.

Speak out :

We have cast the die, and must not lose the stake.
Speak, Julian, speak—Wilt thou be Emperor?

1ST SOLDIER. Ay, that's my mind.

2nd. And mine.

3rd. And mine.

4th. And mine.

MUTIUS.

Then give a general shout, and send scared Echo
Even to the frightened ears of Tyranny.

No longer Cæsar now, all hail Augustus!

Julian Augustus, Julian Augustus, hail!

[JULIAN covers his face with his hand as the
Soldiers repeat this cry. They press cla-
morously round him.

MAXIMUS.

My prince, consent: 'tis death or empire.

JULIAN.

Well,

This is no time for thought; no choice! so be it!
Comrades, I thank you!—as you will.

[General shout.

SOLDIERS.

Huzza!

Huzza, huzza! Long live the Emperor!

[*The Soldiers lift JULIAN on their shields and
bear him out triumphantly.*]

Manent MARK, JOVIAN, HORMISDAS.

JOVIAN.

Bishop of Arethusa, do we dream?
Or has some sudden shadow of the brain
Obscured our just perceptions? Oh! is this
The Julian thou didst wrap thy fancy round,
And solace our slow way with picturing?
Saidst thou his soul was eagle-winged? In sooth
It hath the talon and the beak—the wing
Daring in flight, and the eye of empery.

MARK.

My Lord, in very truth I'm sick to the soul;
Bewildered—stunned; struck to the feeble spring
Of my old blood. Excuse my fainting spirit;
My vigour hath collapsed—I am a child now.

JOVIAN.

Yet was there never need of manlier counsel;
A judgment, calm, clear, deep, like a hushed lake
Before the storm hath stirred its anger up.

What think'st thou, Prince Hormisdas? Nay,
my Lord,
Hath *thine* eye caught the fascination?

HORMISDAS

Gods!

There is some hope for Persia yet! Behold him,
How graciously, yet with what noble air,
That master-spirit rides on their stout shoulders,
How on their necks, that feel nor weight nor yoke,
(Even like caparisoned steeds that snuff the
battle,)

He plants his firm foot! See, his outstretched arm
Draws out his mantle's lordly drapery!
He speaks—the sun hath touched his fine-turned
head
(Bare, and his black locks shook out in the wind)
With a new glory. Beautiful!

MARK.

Alas! Sir,

You see, as once *I* saw, with youthful eyes.

HORMISDAS.

Oh, if it be the sin of youth to yield
The fresh heart to its ecstasy, and clothe
Man's mortal mould in garniture of Gods,
The visionary garb of divine virtue,
May I ne'er pass this noon of life, nor mourn

The twilight of an earth-worn spirit !

JOVIAN.

Prince,
Thou look'st to the fair side of things ; perhaps
With more of wisdom, deeper philosophy,
Than they who bind down reason to vain schools,
And chain kind feelings to the formula
Of habit.

MARK.

Nay, Sir, worldly experience hath
Yielded to man maxims, that have the force
Of solemn revelation.

JOVIAN.

I know not.
Reason lends small aid in a case like this.

MARK.

Conscience and faith lend much.

JOVIAN.

My mind misgives me,
Julian hath cause to be dissatisfied :
Much scope for sorrow ; ample precedent
For hatred—ay, for fear. The name of traitor
Suits not with his past actions—traitorous thoughts
Were not the aliment of his young hopes.
We cannot stem this current : it were better
To be partakers of its vigour.

MARK.

Surely

To argue with a heart conflicting thus
Were a vain effort: time be our judge. Come, Sir,
Let us depart.

HORMISDAS.

Ay, in the Cæsar's train:

My mind's resolved. Now his, and his for ever.

[*Exeunt.*]*Chamber in the Palace.*

CONSTANTIA and her Women at domestic em-
ployments.

CONSTANTIA (*laying down her embroidery*).

'Tis a vain strife: my hand obeys me not.
I cannot bind my mind to useful thoughts,
Or mould my limbs to steadfast occupation.
Oh, little heart, lie still! Virgilia!

VIRILIA.

Madam?

CONSTANTIA.

'Tis strange, is't not? no tidings yet
Have reached me from my husband. Know you
aught—
Aught that can comfort me?

VIRGILIA.

Madam, 'tis said
The Cæsar hath fresh victories in Gaul.

CONSTANTIA.

I hate to hear of battles. This rude glory
Looks upon woman with a mournful eye;
Telling of blood-dissevered ties; sad stories
Of widows weeping by lone sepulchres,
And orphans flinging flowers on obscure graves.
Oh, Julian! where art thou?

VIRGILIA.

Dear Madam, surely,
Surely the Prince is well; to-night, believe me,
Glad tidings of home-bending steps shall greet
you.

CONSTANTIA.

My good Virgilia; gentle comforter!
Thou art most soothing ever. I believe,
In spite of this strange flutter at my heart,
These bodings, that, like frightful dreams, oppress
me,
These fretful visions, dull anxieties,
That make me start at every noise and tremble,
I do believe—alas! my heart again
Hath got the evil spirit in it, throbbing
As if the very blood would burst its channel,

Then sinking, faint, and sickly.

VIRGILIA.

Would to Heaven
We were once more at Athens. I remember
When you were yet unwedded—

CONSTANTIA.

Say not anything
Slighting the bliss of wedlock : I would cherish
That as my greatest good.

VIRGILIA.

We were both girls ;
You, like a vine, swelling your half-ripe clusters
Beneath the mellowing sun ; we, like the leaves,
Thick-clustering round to shelter you : nor
wholly

Without appropriate beauty ; yet most noted
As setting you off freshly. What a pleasure—
When morning emptied his great urn of light
On top of grey Hymettus, or when evening
Pillowed her cheek upon the glossy wave,
With purple shadows curtained—how delicious
Was't then to mount that old Acropolis,
And pace along the marble ramparts, viewing
Whate'er of nature or sublimest art
Stands beautiful around : things, though of earth,
That have an intellectual language !

CONSTANTIA.

Sweetly

We passed our days there. It was there I saw
first

My Julian : he was standing in the Stoa,
Wrapped in his academic robe, amidst
A group of awful men, earth-honoured sages,
Discoursing deep philosophy. Go on.

VIRGILIA.

I call to memory too, the pleasant hours,
When, in the noon-tide, like gay butterflies,
We revelled in the sunshine—or, like bees,
Went culling the sweet flowers.

CONSTANTIA.

Or sat beneath

The temple-crowned height of Sunium. Oh,
I loved to stand on some high beetling rock,
Or dusky brow of savage promontory,
Watching the waves, with all their white crests
dancing,
Come, like thick-plumed squadrons, to the shore
Gallantly bounding.

VIRGILIA.

We had a sweet companion,
(Alas ! now dead,) Tithona. She was fraught
As a full fountain with its sparkling waters,

From youth with exquisite thoughts—those
graceful fables
(For fables they are surely) of old times,
When, as they said, the air, and earth, and sea,
Were peopled with divinities. You've not
Forgotten yet, how prettily she told
Her little stories, still embellishing
(As she proceeded with her fond enthusiasm
And memory of youthful tutelage,)
With eloquent mystery and most pagan fancy?
You have not these forgotten?

CONSTANTIA.

Could I forget?

I hear with tears : proceed—I love to listen.

VIRGILIA.

What strange adventures she would tell : of
Nymphs
Beloved of Satyrs ; and transformed maids
Wooed by the Tritons in the deep sea-cave,
Or sporting in their innocent coquetry
On dolphins' backs, round shell-borne Amphi-
trite,
Along the heaving billows. There was not
A sun-beam, or a cloud, or casual shadow,
But had a tale, wild, sweet, imaginative,
To account for it ; some illustration apt,

Some link that bound inanimate nature with
Her breathing soul.

CONSTANTIA.

It was her custom—thus ;
When clouds were swift careering through the
sky,
And lights and shades shot o'er the mountain's
side,
Then would she say the spirits of the air
Held their deft revels 'twixt the earth and sun,
Casting light shadows downward. Was't not so ?

VIRGILIA.

Ay, and the Nereids saw she often.

CONSTANTIA.

True ;
She loved to tell, how, when the wind blows
strong
Ashore, the Nereids then do love to gather
Their flocks from the green deep of troubled
ocean ;
Then might you see the fleecy fools all hurrying,
Crowding, and tumbling one a-top the other,
Into some sheltered cove, or sunny basin ;
Rank after rank still rushing up the shore,
Leaving their white coats tufting every rock,
Then vanishing.

VIRGILIA.

I well remember too,
She told me of a mermaid once, that lay
Along the scooped side of a hollow wave,
Singing such dulcet music, that the ear,
Like a wooed damsel, trembled with delight.

CONSTANTIA.

I thank thee, sweet Virgilia, for these thoughts :
Thou hast weaned me from unprofitable sorrow,
At least for the moment—and Heaven knows,
 this life
Should not be preyed upon by phantoms.
 Welcome,

[To EUSEBIA, *entering*.

My sister, mother, friend ! welcome, oh welcome !
I stand in need of comfort. It is good
To see some face we love, to press some hand
That hath the warmth of kindred feeling in it
When we feel desolate. But why is this ?
Thy hand withdrawn, thy face averted from me ?
Art thou a messenger of grief—Eusebia ?
Eusebia, speak to me—my Julian ?—speak !

EUSEBIA.

Appease your vain alarm. He lives, is well :
But—

CONSTANTIA.

Oh, delay me not : this long pause kills me.
Speak, speak !

EUSEBIA.

Constantia, I have loved him with
A love that few but wives or mothers feel :
I loved him, for the life I saved : I loved him
For the proud structure of his fame and fortunes,
Raised by my skill : I loved him, as he grew
Blessed in your loving him ('twas my work also),
And now—How can I hate ?

CONSTANTIA.

Hate ! good Heaven !
Whither does all this tend ?

EUSEBIA.

I dare not tell thee.

CONSTANTIA.

Knowest thou, Virgilia ? Ah ! thy face looks
sad :

All faces are turned from me. Oh, I knew
Some terrible misfortune overhung me—
I had prophetic warnings.

[*Enter an OFFICER, who whispers* EUSEBIA.

EUSEBIA.

What's to be done ? so near ! terrible conflict !
Nay, nay, no compromise with duty. No :

At any price the rebel must be stopped.

CONSTANTIA.

Rebel!—my brain will burn. All, all, I see it.

Rebel!—then fratricide! It cannot be.

Oh, thrones are built on graves. He dies who
falls!

Who—what art thou? say quickly.

Enter MAXIMUS.

MAXIMUS.

Hail, Augusta!

CONSTANTIA.

Behold the Empress there: be her's the greeting.

MAXIMUS.

Julian,—the Emperor—bade me thus salute

His wife—Constantia. Therefore hail, Augusta!

The circle of the diadem is narrow

And will not fit two heads. I kiss thy hand.

[Kneeling.]

CONSTANTIA.

Off, off, there's spotted pestilence upon thee.

I dare not touch thee. Rebel!

MAXIMUS.

Madam, that title

The event alone determines. Honour at times

Looks doubtfully on points at issue—but

I humbly think that when the die is cast,

And the game won, the goodly stake and glory
May stand conceded to the conqueror.

CONSTANTIA.

Traitor !

MAXIMUS.

Recall the name, lady—if mine,
At least I bear it in good company. [*Rising.*
'Tis not for me, the Pontifex of Gods,
To kneel at human feet. The Emperor bade me
Deliver these few lines, penned in some haste :
He will be presently here. Madam, be comforted,
 [*Turning to EUSEBIA.*

The heart of memory is soft, yet bears
Indelible impressions. You have done
Deeds that have stood in good report—kind
 services

To Julian, when he needed them, that live,
Stored in his treasury of grateful thoughts.
For your sake hath Augustus bade me say,
The slayer shall be spared.

EUSEBIA.

 Away, away !
I know thee, Maximus : beneath that mantle
Thou hid'st a dark hypocrisy. Ambition
Within those philosophic folds lies watching,
Even like the ambushed wolf, in act to spring.

Priest of the Pagan Gods, in other ears
Distil thy poison !

MAXIMUS.

Empress, (as thou wert,
And shalt be yet, spite of false fate,) directress
Of man's more feeble judgment ! Well I know
The love thou bear'st to Julian, and the sway
Thy counsel should have o'er him. Hear me
then—
I've owed thee something.

EUSEBIA.

Else those preaching lips
Had now been mouldering in the elements ;
And the wind singing through thee.

MAXIMUS.

Even so.

I kept my faith and live—I thank thee for it—
My turn comes now : I rule, and I would save thee
For better days. Bend to the blast and live—
Resist, and be uprooted !

EUSEBIA.

Tempter, away !

Enter SALLUST as from a journey.

Worthy old man, good Sallust, thou arrivest
Most opportunely. Saucy traitors tread
Thy master's hearth with insolent defiance :

Rebellion starts us in our very palace,
Nay grasps with impious hand our awful person.
In good time dost thou come. Nay, Sir, how's
this?

Thine eyes are wet: thy furrowed cheek is pale
With more than time: even as a ravelled page
Where sorrow writes dim characters.

CONSTANTIA.

Oh, Sallust!

What new misfortune waits us? What of my
brother?

SALLUST.

Mother of Rome, thou art a widow! Princess,
Thou hast no brother!

[CONSTANTIA and EUSEBIA throw themselves
into each other's arms.

MAXIMUS (*to the attendants*).

Bear in those royal mourners to their chamber.
Weak, shallow women! fathomless and witless,
You see the way, yet fear to tread it; long
With full as deep desires as men, yet shrink
From the accomplishment. You would be great,
Yet lack the daring; and when nobler hands
Have toiled for you, your appetite grows
squeamish,
And, with grave histrionic, you reject

That which you crave. [*Turning to SALLUST.*
Why, Sallust, 'tis auspicious news.

SALLUST.

Not so.

Though it relieves thee from the garb of treason,

MAXIMUS.

Add, too, it gives some breathing time for prayer
To certain grey-beards, and saves heads on
shoulders

That else had made acquaintance with the scaffold.
How died he?

SALLUST.

At Tarsus—suddenly.

MAXIMUS.

No matter :

That he is dead suffices—but behold,
Here comes the reaper of the harvest.

Enter JULIAN attended.

(*Both kneeling*).

Cæsar,

Julian Augustus, hail !

JULIAN (*with agitation*).

Where is Constantia?

MAXIMUS.

I gave your letter to the Empress ; bending
In homage as became me. She thereat
Seemed moved, and honoured me with epithets,

Excuse me that I blazon not abroad.
Then came this messenger of your good fortune,
Sallust, from Tarsus ; where your enemy,
The shedder of your household blood, lies dead.
'Tis not for me to judge or censure—but
If Julian pushes yon closed door aside,
He'll gather his Constantia's thoughts, and hear
How wives discuss the actions of their husbands,
In no equivocal language.

[JULIAN *rushes into the inner chamber.*

Exeunt.

*The Imperial Chamber, immediately before
day-break.*

JULIAN.

I cannot sleep ! Ten thousand, thousand thoughts
Crowd in my restless bosom. Phantasy
At this lone hour invokes her spectral train,
Shadowy suggestions—incontrollable.
A fearful Hope is busy here, and Memory
Sits like a pallid mourner at my side :
My heart is swollen with expectations large ;
I know not wherefore—a dull weight is there—
Sighing I heave it off, but it returns.
My eyes are dim with watching : a broad seal
Pressed on my brow by some invisible hand,

Scorches my brain. Oh, sleep ! Oh, gentle sleep !
Would I might court thee on a peasant's pallet :
I have not slumbered since I wore a crown !

CONSTANTIA (*entering*).

Julian, my husband !

The morning light has dawned. Where hast
thou been ?

These vigils will destroy thee.

JULIAN.

Ay, my love,

The brain hath need of rest : the limbs are
strong

In spite of many hardships ; but the mind—
The mind should have repose. Constantia,
wherefore

Is sleep an alien to these royal chambers ?
I cannot find beneath this purple robe
On all the down of the imperial pillow,
Even with thy form of beauty stretched beside
me,

One natural slumber : my eyes are ever open
Upon the past and future. I am denied
Oblivion ! It *was* not so, Constantia—
It was not so !

CONSTANTIA.

My Lord, forbear these thoughts.

We have been happy ;—we again shall be so :
You will redeem all yet !

JULIAN.

It cannot be.

My subjects in revolt, my crown at stake,
My glory questioned ; the bright world of fame
For which my very soul was bartered, all
Trembling like foam upon the stormy waters !
I have defied my God, and will not now
Strike my proud banner to audacious man !

CONSTANTIA.

Julian, the empire of the earth is yours,
What would you more ?

JULIAN.

The Roman Capitol
Contains the shrines of many demigods,
Mortals, by human worship deified.
They trod this world in glory—therefore man
Hath clothed them with immortal attributes.

CONSTANTIA.

My husband, come to rest ; these watchful nights
Disturb you.

JULIAN.

You believe me mad ? Is't so ?—
Call me ambitious, say, that I despise
The folly that has made me so, and scorn

The ministering wickedness that crouches round
me—

Your eye distresses me.

CONSTANTIA.

Oh, Julian, why
Should wisdom and infirmity be brothers?
Virtue and vice both wedded to one heart
Do breed a hell on earth.

JULIAN.

I know it—feel it.
I have not trod in vain the crooked ways :
I have not trampled down opposing nature
Unwitting of the peril and the penance.
I have attained that height to which the eye
Looks with a stupid wonder. I have felt
The longings, and enjoyed the full fruition ;—
And what the price? He that has scaled steep
mountains,
And walked the misty precipice's edge
On loose and slippery rocks, hath felt the danger
Press, like a giant hand, his shivering heart,
Till drops of ice would start.

CONSTANTIA.

But you have reach'd—

JULIAN.

Reach'd what?—a lonely pinnacle, from whence

The earth looks boundless, but without a feature.
There do I stand, a mark for every storm
To hiss around—or, haply, seen as one
Whose darkened outline moves along a height
Spotting the evening's glow.

CONSTANTIA.

Oh, do not say
The lot of greatness cannot be a happy one.
Good deeds make happy hearts. The monarch's
crown
Encircles a vast sphere :—'tis his to raise
Unheeded worth from base obscurity ;
To soothe the sorrow-laden ; to crush oppression ;
Reform the profligate manners of bad times—
Oh, 'tis a glorious office.

JULIAN.

Know you not,
How monarchs are oppressed by stately burdens?
They have not leisure for mere private good.
The lowly station can alone recall
The flying hour by its appropriate virtue,
And make for memory paths of pleasantness.
But see, through yonder casement, the young
sunbeam
Looks in with salutation—beautiful type
Of those great aspirations that subdue,

Mould, and exalt, this mortal case of man
To that which makes him more than man ; which
 filling

His perishable veins with fire from Heaven
Clothe him i' th' immortality of fame !

CONSTANTIA.

How cool and moist comes in this morning
 air :

Nature awakens with a sigh, and tears
Are on her beautiful countenance : a veil
Of tender mist partially hangs around her,
As if to hide some sorrow ere she smiles.
Surely there is infection in these objects ;
Gazing, a tender pleasure steals upon me,
Yet could I weep.

JULIAN.

 All natural objects have
An echo in the heart. This body thrills,
And has connexion by some unseen chain
With its original source and kindred substance.
The mighty forest, the proud tides of ocean,
Sky-cleaving hills, and, in the vast of air,
The starry constellations ; and the sun,
Parent of life exhaustless—these maintain
With the mysterious mind and breathing mould
A co-existence and community.

CONSTANTIA.

Julian, in our first love you talked to me
Thus, and I never feel the morning air,
Or look upon the rising of the sun,
Without some sweet associate emotion.
Our early love was happy. Was it not?

JULIAN.

Happy? Oh, yes, most innocently happy!
(Sweet woman, thou hast always been so.)

Happy?

Would I had only studied thy sweet looks,
Had sought Divinity but on thy lips,
Had asked no other empire but thy beauty—
But I have been beset by ravenous appetites;
Passions have preyed upon my heart and thriven;
The ladder of a limitless ambition
Hath yielded steps for evil thoughts to mount.
Happy?—even thou hast almost lost the charm,
(And how I love thee, witness all ye powers
Divine or fabled,) thou that wert once my all—
I am a ruin. [He walks apart abstractedly.

CONSTANTIA (*aside*).

My unhappy Julian!

Ah, what a wreck is that majestic mind!
Thy very features are not what they were,
Then were thy beauties shadows, and the light

That cast them from thee,—is it all departed ?

[JULIAN *throws himself upon a couch.*

He sinks upon that couch—oh, weary, weary !

Last night he slept not: haply he may sleep

Now and be soothed. Perhaps the breath of
music

May prove more eloquent than my poor words :

It is the medicine of the breaking heart.

[*Music plays, she approaches him.*

His eyes are closed. Thou art indeed a ruin,

But grand and glorious in thy desolation,

Like a decaying temple. I would be

The weed that gathers round thy broken pillars,

The bird that nestles in thy lonely chambers,

The pilgrim kneeling at thy shattered altar,

The faithful light that shines with equal warmth

On the deserted arch and festal palace.

How pale he is, and yet how beautiful !

I'll kiss him as he dreams.

[*Music again and song.*

What is Power? 'Tis not the state

Of proud tyrants, whom men's hate,

To worse than death,

Can level with a breath—

Whose term the meanest hand can antedate—

The peasant with a heart at ease,
Is a greater man than these.

What is Grandeur? Not the sheen
Of silken robes ; no, nor the mien
And haughty eye
Of old nobility—
The foolish thing that *is* not, but *has been*.
The noblest trophies of mankind
Are the conquests of the mind.

What is Beauty? Not the show
Of shapely limbs and features. No.
These are but flowers
That have their dated hours
To breathe their momentary sweets, then go.
'Tis the stainless soul within
That outshines the fairest skin.

What is Love? 'Tis not the kiss
Of a harlot lip—the bliss
That doth perish,
Even while we cherish
The fleeting charm : and what so fleet as this?
He is blessed in love alone,
Who loves for years, and loves but one.

What is Glory? Not the breath
Of vain, venal crowds—nor death
Amid the cry
Of vaunting victory :
Nor on the living brow war's sanguine wreath.
He who maintains his country's laws
Alone is great; or he who dies in the good
cause.

Enter EUSEBIA.

CONSTANTIA.

Oh, art thou come? my best Eusebia.
Thy very step brings strength and peace. See
there,
My hope, my fear, my love, my all ! Behold him
How desolate—desolate. He has not slept :
There is no comfort for him. In his bosom
Lurks a coiled adder ; and that golden crown
Presses his temples like a ring of fire.

EUSEBIA.

Let me approach—softly, I will not wake him.
Pale countenance, I would peruse thee!—No,
Thou'rt guiltless of that deed—if that in truth
He died by any mortal hand. No, No!
Thou hast been full of guilt, but not of that ;
And strangely wert thou tempted—

Enter MAXIMUS.

There, alas!

The tempter comes—ill omens follow him.
What does this bad man here?

CONSTANTIA.

He has strange influence
Over his mind, and ever like a fiend
Exerts it for his torture. He is to me
Courteous, but never meets my eye; and yet
I oft feel his on me scowling, and tremble.

MAXIMUS. [*Approaching.*

Ladies, an humble subject proffers duty.
You taste the breath of the morn's infancy:
'Tis healthful in its sweetness. Have I licence
To see the Emperor?

CONSTANTIA.

He has but just wooed sleep:
Disturb him not—it were unkind.

MAXIMUS.

Nay, Madam,
My errand, like the heel of Mercury,
Hath a swift wing on't, and may not delay.

CONSTANTIA.

Do thou then, dear Eusebia, since it must be,
Breathe on him softly and so awaken him.

[EUSEBIA *stoops and kisses his forehead.*

JULIAN (*awakening*).

Oh, world !

Must I again look on thee? Who art thou?
My mother? for by that name I must call thee,
The willing slave of custom, duty, and love—
Thou art most welcome. After tedious vigils,
The sight of such a morning face as thine is,
(Pale, though it be with sorrow, yet most fresh
In the kind streaks of womanly affections)
Braces the spring of the mind: for 'tis with me,
As with a sick man, viewing once again
Fields, waters, woods, and the blue bending
skies—

Or traveller cooled by shadow of a cloud,
With its light breeze just starting on the wing,
Upon a sultry day.

EUSEBIA.

Julian, 'tis true,

My womanly affections have subdued me
(Mysterious in their mastery) to follow
The triumph of thy chariot-wheel—but, nay,
I come for mutual comfort, and renounce
These sad reflections. Pray you, look cheerfuller,
Methought you did just now. Are you not
satisfied?

I cease vain murmuring.

JULIAN.

'Twere best, 'twere best !
But whom hast thou brought here ? Like a con-
spirator
He stands i' th' shade, wrapped in his silent
cloak :

It is not safe when eyes like his—Oh, pardon—
Pardon, Lord Pontifex, I do confess
At such an hour thou wert (with shame I own it)
An unknown apparition, and unlooked for.

MAXIMUS.

And yet, Sir, I would flatter me, there is
That intimate intelligence of minds,
That interchange of thought, identity
Of habits, recollections, and resolves,
That we *should* know each other?

JULIAN.

Ay, true, true !
But why thus early must we slight our pillows ?
Sleep's but a feeble foretaste of calm death,
Yet half partakes oblivion. Why should we
wake
To stretch the mind out on untimely racks ?

MAXIMUS.

It grieves me, Sir, to be the messenger
Of evil.

JULIAN.

Thereat ease your mind : I care not.
The current of my blood's tempestuous,
And, like the air, I'm liveliest after storms.
Does disaffection take a tangible shape?
A head this sword can reach ? If so, 'tis well.

MAXIMUS.

No, Sir, your enemies are circumspect,
And rather show like th' unsubstantial shadows
That mock the traveller in the desert. Truly
These Nazarenes are hydra-headed. Nay
Their very blood hath seed in't, and springs up
A crop of holy disputants ;—hot zealots
Armed at all points. The old tale was no fable.

JULIAN.

Is this all?

MAXIMUS.

No ; they've vowed for their new altar
A victim ; not redress, but stern revenge.
They seek not vantage of encountered arms
On a fair field, allies and friends beside them,
But, added to that chance, the slow, sure step
Of the assassin.

JULIAN.

Ha ! 'tis indeed a sure step—
A short solution of much strife. Oh, Maximus,

Raise not those thoughts of horror. They awake
All deadly passions in me.

MAXIMUS.

So, let it be.

These are not common rebels,—they assail
By fraud and force our awful laws, dear habits,
Ancient religion, chosen sovereign.
They have won the Persian Sapor too. Read there :
This paper, black with well-known signatures,
Divulges terrible truths—peruse and judge.
Meanwhile I venture to retire. I need not
Point out what is inevitable. [Exit.

JULIAN (*after perusing with violent agitation*).

There is no penalty that earthly mould
Can bear, or wit devise, or wrath inflict,
Commensurate with their crime. Down, damned
thought!

It is not retribution ! No, no, no.

I never did a deed like this.—Away,

Vain spectres of the brain !—I slew no *friend* ;

I trampled down no *benefactor*. Hence !

I will not now look back.

CONSTANTIA (*timidly approaching*).

My lord ! my husband !

JULIAN (*not heeding her*).

Thou too, old Mark ?—

Oh, treachery, treachery!—my earliest friend !
Nay then—one wide proscription strike ye all !

CONSTANTIA.

Turn not away—turn not away, my love :
I would approach thee in the humbleness
And sorrowful abasement of bruised love,
Gently to probe thy griefs and so to cure them.

JULIAN.

Thou, thou, my wife, *his* sister ? Get thee gone,
Fair woman :—touch not madness in his mood.
Go, go !

EUSEBIA.

Retire, Constantia ; press him not—
Be blind to this, or seem so. (*Aside.*) [*Exeunt.*

JULIAN (*alone*).

Why have I made
This heart the lair of passion ? wherefore trained
My soul to lion-like ambition ? Thus
To be the chase of jackals ! Read, proud spirit—
Read, who and what thy pitiful hunters are.
Nature, why hast thou shaped me thus ? Thou
shouldst

Have cased my heart in iron ; trained my lip,
Even at my mother's breast, to blood ; and leagued
My spirit with the vulture. Be it so.
Just kings make happy subjects—so, conversely,

Bad subjects cause the tyranny they curse.
Why am I thus enforced? Weak, wretched vic-
tims!

My life ye aim at, reckless of your own :
Ye play deep stakes, nor calculate the loss.
Vain plotting knaves! Chartered conspirators,
That sit in mockery of justice; thus
Dispensing doom—when you yourselves are
judged.

Ripe though ye be to shedding, justice must be
A long-armed reaper to embrace you all.
Great Gods! what names are here? Mercy,
farewell!

In vain ye shall not paint me thus—a monster :
Ye make the tyrant that ye feign—now tremble !
[Exit.

Street in Constantinople.

A Crowd pass with uproar.

1ST CITIZEN.

Here, neighbour, here—we'll take our station
here.

2nd. Ay, there is vantage for the eye here.
How now?

Press not upon us so unmannerly !

3rd. We have as good right to press here as
you have.

Make way, make way.

1st. Good neighbours, do not quarrel,
Good mob, be peaceable. Hark, there's a
shout,

Be quiet, friends—you'll hear and see the better.

[MUTIUS *passes, affecting a pompous man-
ner.*

A SOLDIER.

Hollo there, Mutius! why, man, thou wert used
To have a quick ear at a comrade's service—
Mutius, I say.

MUTIUS.

What manner of man art thou?
Whom dost thou take me for? I know thee not.

SOLDIER.

How now, how now! thou dusty specimen
Of an extenuated mummy. What!
Thou shadow, thou——

MUTIUS.

Enough——

[*Drawing, the crowd interposes.*

CITIZEN.

Put up your swords,
Untimely brawlers.

MUTIUS.

Nay, his plebeian breath
Hath tainted my gentility.

CITIZEN.

Fie, fie !

We shall have need soon of our swords and
courage.

MUTIUS.

Prithee expound ; I have indeed heard rumours,
Good man of peace—thrice honoured citizen,
Be circumstantial and explicit.

CITIZEN.

Well, Sir,

We shall have war, methinks. Ambassadors
From Sapor, King of Persia, have arrived,
With grave remonstrance, sharp-edged question-
ings,
To stir our choleric Emperor.

MUTIUS.

There's hope then—

I'm glad on't—glad on't. Comrade, here's my
hand.

We'll fight together bravely yet. Why, gentle-
men,

I would not boast much what I've known or done ;
But I have done some service which he knows of—

The Emperor—ay, and hath rewarded too.
And I can tell you he won't stand much chafing.

CITIZEN.

Well, we shall see. Th' Ambassadors just now
Have wound their brave procession by the

Hippodrome,

And doubtless will demand free audience.

MUTIUS.

Humph ! they'll have sorry satisfaction, Sirs !

SOLDIER.

Centurion !

MUTIUS.

Sir, accommodate your speech
To the advancement of my dignity,
I now command a cohort.

SOLDIER.

Pardon, brave Captain.

'S blood : why not say so sooner ?

MUTIUS.

Circumscribe

Thy terror, thou art awe-struck : I am placable.
Be satisfied—we shall have sport enough yet.
I'm an old soldier and have swum the Tigris,
And I can tell you, there is that beyond
Would make the blood dance in an old man's
vein.

There are your loosely-vested Persians too,
With their dark tresses, and their eyes, oh,
Venus!

How beautiful their eyes are : black as a fawn's
And sparkling as a sun-beam on a spring,
Or stars at midnight. Then their wild expres-
sion—
The wicked things !

CITIZEN.

Your eloquence is tempting.
On the strength of't I could fancy me a man
Of war—you lead fine lives campaigning.

MUTIUS.

So—so ;
But passable upon my reputation. Why, Sir,
This life of ours is like an April day,
Sunshine and tempest interchangeably.
'Tis good when comrades gather round the board
And dip their jests in rosy wine : 'tis good
When at the close of a well-foughten field,
The unharmed victor counts the goodly spoil :
'Tis good when the strained limbs expatiate
On a down cushion, or a couch of heather :
'Tis good to dance a laughing girl on knee—
Ay, ay, you take me there ; but see the obverse.
'S death, Sir, what say you to a midnight march,

Through snow and sleet—no fire, no food, no
wine :

To plunge into a quagmire for a bed,
Change female laughter for the cry of battle ;
For amorous encounters—ambushed foes ;
Groans for soft sighs, and sudden blows for kisses !

CITIZEN.

Methinks 'twere best to stay at home.

MUTIUS.

For you, Sir,

A most sagacious choice, and argues much
Self-knowledge, meekness, and a sound discre-
tion.

For us—but pardon me, too long I lecture—
It is a science abstruse and complicate,
And needs the true vocation.

[*Crowd rushes past.*

CITIZEN (*in passing*).

Haste, boys, haste,

The Emperor hath passed the Hippodrome.

1ST CITIZEN.

Good Captain, wilt thou see th' Ambassadors'
audience ?

'Twill be a goodly show.

2ND CITIZEN.

Ay, and there is

A grand procession of the Nazarenes.

MUTIUS.

The Nazarenes? Oh, ay, they would implore
Augustus for indulgence.

CITIZEN.

That is their purpose ;
And Bishop Mark, the Emperor's old tutor,
Walks at their head, armed with a stout remon-
strance.

MUTIUS.

I know him well, good masters. He should be-
ware !

When we saluted Julian first as Emperor,
He somewhat stood in the way. I can't afford
To save his life twice. Sirs, lead on : I follow.
[*Exeunt.*]

Hall of State.

JULIAN on his Throne. MAXIMUS, ANATOLIUS,
NEVITTA, JOVIAN, SALLUST, HORMISDAS,
and OFFICERS.

Enter at one side NOHORDATES *and* MERANES,
Persian Ambassadors, attended. At the other
side, MARK, Bishop of Arethusa, with ecclesiastics,
in mourning.

JULIAN.

Pass to the business of the day.

ANATOLIUS.

My Lord,

Sundry petitions straight demand your care :
Some trivial, some of weight and moment : each,
As leisure serves, demanding scrutiny.
Here's one from Caius Galba, a centurion,
In the Prætorian band, seeking redress
For loss in the popular tumults. Here's another
From the sixth legion, just arrived from Gaul,
Craving free quarters in the suburbs. This
Records complaint from Spain 'gainst the Pro-
consul,
And there are many more here ; a mixed multi-
tude

That may await more leisure. There are, however,

Two of most pressing import: one, a memorial
And solemn protest of the Christian church,
Assembled here in Synod. They have deputed
As advocate, Mark, Bishop of Arethusa.
Here too are letters from the King of Persia
Demanding audience for Ambassadors.

JULIAN.

Let Caius Galba have some recompense
From our peculiar purse. The legion'ries
Must take free quarters from an enemy:
Pass them across the Hellespont. My Lords,
I well believe that the Proconsul is
A brave man and an honest: this complaint,
Therefore, dismiss. Let the Ambassadors
Of Sapor, King of Persia, speak their purpose.

[Ambassadors approach in a haughty manner.]

ANATOLIUS.

These, my imperial liege, are noble Satraps:
Meranes, Nohordates; they are known
In Roman story with advantage.

MAXIMUS.

Sirs,

Your Persian air is sovereign for stiff necks;
At Ctesiphon methinks you bow much lower:—

'Tis needful and exacted too.

JULIAN.

Ambassadors,

Speak quickly to your errand : we await,
Being in haste, a speedy exposition.

MERANES.

The King sends greeting to Rome's General.

NEVITTA.

Slave ! dost not know the title that earth's lord
Bears on his throne ?

JULIAN.

My good Nevitta, nay,
It but awaits a bloody blazonry.
Proceed —

MERANES.

We speak, Sir, but as messengers.
Sapor demands why Julian hath transgressed
The truce signed by the dead Constantius ?
Why Roman soldiers, from our swords redeemed
To heal their wounds upon the lap of Peace,
Affront our borders with their ransomed banners ?
Our Persian earth is sullied by their tread ;
Our Persian air is tainted by their breath.
Lastly, we ask, (if Rumour's voice speak truly,)
Why is the Nazarene disfranchised ? Wherefore
His altar and his home proscribed ?

JULIAN.

Pause there, Sir :

You have been forward in your questioning;
Our answer shall be made in Ctesiphon.
Yet say thus much : Rome to her chariot-wheel
Hath bound barbarian Kings ere now.

Enough—

Begone.

NOHORDATES.

We go, Sir : but it first becomes us,
Who in true custody do hold the keys
Of war and peace—solemn depositaries—
To lift the veil that blinds you. Sir, I say
It well accords with valour to unfold
Its armoury of strength, ere yet it strikes;
And therefore we would open spread the book
Of time, and point the lessons of the past,
And bid you read and profit ere we part.

NEVITTA (*springing forward*).

Ha, Caitiff! say'st thou?

JULIAN (*interposing*).

Nay, discourteous friend,
Commit not thus our honour.

MERANES.

Roman Emperor!

Wilt not vouchsafe reply?

JULIAN.

Ay, my good Lords—

NOHORDATES.

How, Sir?

JULIAN.

In blood and flames at Ctesiphon.

[Shout from the populace.]

AMBASSADORS.

We ask safe-conduct.

JULIAN.

'Tis not needed.

AMBASSADORS.

Sir,

We know not that. Our pledge?

JULIAN.

That you still live.

[Populace shout again — the Ambassadors retire.]

And now my friends, our hands are full methinks
Of that we sought not, nor would shun. This
enemy

Hath a brave bearing, and is worth our pains.

I love an open foe, in whose stern eye

I read a character my own replies to.

It is a stirring sight to see the sun

Start back from some score thousand burnished
helms,

And angry flash from off the bright spear heads;
And therefore I rejoice at this, and see in't
Glory, and large advantage to the State.
And what, my Lords, advantages a State
Like glory? 'Tis the very breath by which
Society exists: the unseen bond
That holds man to his duties: the bright chain
That links him with a nobler nature. Fame
Is not a faithless echo;—not the cry
Of a vain moment, dying at the birth;
But a celestial herald, like the bow
That looks out beautiful from desolate skies—
The sun that aye renews the youthful year,
And gives the promise of a harvest-home.
Ah! these are thoughts to make our pulses play
As Roman pulses should do.—Ye Gods of Rome!
Where do I lead? Why do I thus enkindle
The generous glow I yet must damp? Oh, grief!
Oh, shame! What shall I say? How teach my
tongue
To link our Roman names with treachery?
Oh, foul, foul, foul! sold for barbarian gold,
They give the kiss of peace with lying lips:
They drug the bowl of revelry with poison:
They walk with daggers 'neath their cloaks, and
pledge

Friendship and faith, with hands upon the hilt !
How shall we face the foe, when at our back
Steals like a wolf the crouched domestic traitor ?
Thou, Maximus, can'st speak to this.

MAXIMUS.

Alas !

My voice is needless to expose the traitors :
Their own damn'd acts have damning witnesses.
They'll not impugn the evidence. My Lords,
'Twere fit the Bishop Mark had audience :
He waits :—the fulness of his time hath come.

ANATOLIUS.

Call forth the Bishop of Arethusa.

MAXIMUS.

[MARK *enters*.

Well, Sir,

Your business, and that quickly : th' Emperor
waits.

MARK.

Sir, I have waited long on him ere now,
And as I hope, not all unprofitably.
Young thoughts work channels in the mind, and
leave
Impressions that years find indelible.

MAXIMUS.

Pray you, good Bishop, we're on business : wear
not

Our time in idle declamation.

MARK.

Maximus,

With thee I combat not.

MAXIMUS.

Bishop, be satisfied :

I waste not strength on shadows, nor tread out

The expiring embers of a sinking flame.

We have no thesis for dispute : the past

To thee is a closed volume.

MARK.

Wretched man !

Thou say'st right well—the past to me is nought,

Yet is it much to thee : an awful book

Which thou shalt read by life's decaying lamp.

But when the flame just brightens ere *I* die,

My hope shall be the future. Thine—oh, where ?

JULIAN.

When you have done with wrangling, Sir, re-
member

Whose time you waste : I'm sick of this.

MARK.

Augustus !

My heart was busy with too many sorrows

To bear this vain man's taunting as I ought ;

As the humility of our faith commands.

JULIAN (*not heeding him*).

'Tis well remembered, Maximus. The fine
Imposed on Antioch's contumacious prelate,
See that 'tis levied. We have sudden need :
This war begets much haste.

MARK.

Alas, alas !

I come here sorrow-laden ; in mine age
Bowed down by more than age inflicts, to be
The advocate of those who needed none,
When I was young, and Julian poor, yet vir-
tuous—

Oh, Sir !

JULIAN (*not heeding him*).

Nevitta, hearken : it were well
To have a stout arm there—at Antioch.
Direct our Gallic legionaries thither
Under brave Dagalaiphus.

MARK (*in agitation*).

Sir, my Sovereign !

Oh, by a name yet dearer, my loved pupil,
(If grandeur may remember infancy,)
Here I kneel down to thee before I die,
Here I adjure thee, as thou too must die,
Add to the hour of death no horrors ! Pity
Thy subjects and thyself !

JULIAN (*not heeding him*).

That Persian madman
Will show his mettle early. Jovian, go thou
And from Sinope move our armaments
Upon Trapezium. That disturbs their flank ;
We meet then on th' Euphrates.

MARK.

Nay, proud Monarch !
May not I hold thine ear and altered eye
With better hope than this ? If thou art deaf
To a nation's cry and blind to old affection,
And lost to manhood's courtesy, I but
Profane the habit that I wear, the symbol
Beneath which martyrs die to live, thus tamely
To kneel to a clay idol ! I pollute
The fair fame of a Roman citizen
Thus truckling to a tyrant. Draw your poniards,
Slaves, worthy of your master ! Consummate
Your infamy with cowardice, ye butchers !
I know ye now : your shafts have struck the eagle !
Why shrink ye from a wren ?

JULIAN (*to his Officers*).

Put up your swords ;
Your passionate zeal outruns your reason.

What !

Slay him beneath my eye ? Men call that murder.

Enacted thus with violence, which just judgment
Might give a nobler name to. Hoary traitor,
Know'st thou that paper? Read, and be dumb.

MARK (*reads*).

I know not,
Yet is my name in signature. I wrote it not.
Can Maximus suggest? perchance—

MAXIMUS.

Thou liest!
What, shall I stand thus taunted by a traitor?

JULIAN.

A paltry subterfuge! 'Tis but the struggle
Of a condemn'd man. Now, my Lords, fare-
well—

Make stern inquiries here. I must attend
Subjects of deeper import. [*Exit, attended.*]

Manent MARK, MAXIMUS, NEVITTA, and *Soldiers*.

MARK.

Julian, my prince!
Abandon not my grey hairs to these blood-
hounds.

Oh, stay: desert me not! He's gone.

MAXIMUS.

Ay, priest,
But fear not—I am merciful: the account

Between us, as thou know'st, is long : thy fate
Shall not be lingering. Methinks, Nevitta,
Augustus hath a conscience tender-edged,
And scrupulous as befits a diadem.

Beneath his eye no criminal must perish.

Oh, no : thus would he seem unto the world
Constructive executioner. 'Tis best thus.

NEVITTA.

Yet he admits the treason.

MAXIMUS.

And the judgment!—

He hath recorded judgment. Good Nevitta,
He said departing that he left this traitor
To a condemned man's struggle. Said he not?

NEVITTA.

In truth I cannot charge my memory
With the exact words : such they were, or seemed
To that effect.

MAXIMUS.

We do interpret so.

Heaven send us firmness in our duty !

NEVITTA.

Well, well,

My path lies here : I doubt not, Maximus,
Thou wilt acquit thy charge with prudence.

Prisoner,

Commend thee to thy gaoler. [Exit.

MAXIMUS (*aside*).

Now must I do

An act that Julian will not thank me for.

His doubtful words are my sufficient warrant.

This old man is a Christian, shrewd and virtuous,

And holds strong place in his affection ; there-
fore

Must be removed, and quickly. Soldiers, seize
him.

Old man, move forward.

MARK.

Whither?

MAXIMUS.

To a cell,

Deep, dark, and narrow ; yet a quiet one—

A peaceful home.

MARK.

I understand : lead on.

[*Exeunt.*

Antioch—Portico of the Temple of Mars.

Enter Crowd of Citizens

1ST CITIZEN.

Well, neighbour, when d'ye think the show will
come?

2nd. Oh, soon: I heard but now the swell of
music

Move faintly up the street. It is so winding
We catch but snatches: at the next turn you'll
hear

A glorious burst of sound.

1st. "Tis a good deed
Thus to revive our warlike ceremonies.

3rd. Like you this war, good neighbour?

1st. Nay, not I:
Howbeit I come a gazer here. Not I—
I have a son with the army; when he left me
A raven flew thrice round his head. His mother
Hath ever since been drooping.

3rd. And my daughter
Is well nigh mad, at parting yesternight
With her fond spouse, new wedded: there they
loitered
Beneath the cypress grove, bounding my garden,

(Juno avert the omen,) till their young hearts
Half broke with pain of parting.

2nd. Well, Sirs, for me
I'm well content: being but a bachelor.
I have small cares to thwart me. I am, there-
fore,

Well pleased to hear of battles, and love glory.

1st. Has blood been spill'd yet? Heard you,
friend?

3rd. 'Tis likely.
The Prefect's vanguard had just passed the bor-
ders,

Pushing for Perisabor. So said the messengers.

2nd. Then shall we hear of blows soon: I
would wager

By this our Cretan archers have essayed
Their strong bows—and our horse of Thessaly
Put forth their paces on the Syrian plains.

[*A sudden sound of music.*

3rd. Gods! what a crash of music: here they
come!

Fall back, fall back, keep silence, and make way.

[*Enter JULIAN and Officers, MAXIMUS as
Pontifex, with Priests, &c. &c. in proces-
sion.—They enter the Gate of the Temple.*

Interior of the Temple of Mars.

MAXIMUS as *Chief Priest before the Altar—in-
ferior Priests ranged at each side—JULIAN on the
steps of the altar—behind him Officers, Citizens.*

Chorus of Priests.

Thou God of our battles, and Lord of the war,
Arise from thy slumber, awake in thy star!
Come down in thy whirlwind of anger, and tread,
Like a vision of wrath, o'er the field of the dead.

The vulture is up on his shadowy wings,
His plume like a hero's, his eye like a king's:
The raven flies after with flap and with croak;
He hath sprung from his branch of the blasted
oak.

Give breath to your trumpet, proud horseman,
for, lo!

Your war-steed hath started at sound of the foe;
His nostrils are arched with impatience; his eye
Hath a fire that will bear thee to conquer or die.

Oh, lives there the recreant would linger?
Avaunt!

O'er the wide earth we'll hunt thee, with scoff
and with taunt.
Give death to the coward ! yet no—let him live :
What more to the good and the brave can we
give ?

Then hail to thee, hail to thee, God of the brave !
Firm trust of the Freeman, last hope of the Slave ;
Come down like a vision of wrath, and appear
As the frown of the sea when the tempest is near.

Descend in thy garment of doom and dismay,
Like the pounce of the eagle that stoops to his prey,
Like the flash that shoots down through the
shadowy air,
Like the spring of the lion when roused from his
lair !

MAXIMUS (*as Pontifex Maximus*).

Victorious Mars, bright God armipotent !
Where'er thine eye looks terrible, where'er
Thy blazing helm affrights the human heart,
Avenger, hearken ! For thy Julian kneels—
Kneels at thy shrine. The sacrificial blood
Steams grateful, as of old, upon thine altars.
Lo, once again the renovated rites—

Once more the vast procession throngs thy gates
With angry shouts, to martial music marching.
We cry for vengeance—hear, avenger, hear !
He comes, he comes, amid yon golden clouds
I see his glorious presence in the air.
He comes, he comes ! Lo, how his coursers strain
Upon the impalpable air their sinewy limbs.
Their eyes and swelling nostrils breathing fire.

[*Addressing JULIAN.*

Thou chosen warrior of the insulted Gods,
Julian, imperial lord, receive the omen !
Voices supreme are murmuring in mine ear,
Prophetic visions rise upon mine eye,
And my heart swells with solemn auguries.
The Gods themselves look down from high
Olympus,
And smile upon thy battle ; as of old
By bards and prophets noted, still they mingle
Their divine nature in our mortal wars,
And vindicate their majesty on earth !
Go, give thy bloody banners to the winds,
Strew the polluted land with victims, crush
With memorable vengeance ! Thee, our temples
Insulted and defiled, our dear Penates
Majestic oracles, and trampled altars,
Invoke, and constitute their sacred champion !

Arise, destroy.

(*People shout.*) Long live the Emperor !
Long live our General ! Julian lead to conquest.

[*JULIAN comes forward slowly.*

(*People shout.*) Kind master, generous friend !
God save thee, Julian !

JULIAN.

My friends, I thank you : yes, my friends ye are,
To you I owe my throne—ye have preserved it.
Nor have I been ungrateful : bear me witness,
When all our barriers, guarded by faint hearts,
Were broken—and advantaged by the times
The wild barbarian came like a flood upon ye,
Whose standard then was foremost to the rescue ?
Whose red right hand redeemed your wasted
fields—

Your smoking homes ? Who struck from savage
grasp
The uplifted sword, even at your children's
throat ?

Tore from his arms the unviolated wife,
And daughter still a virgin ? Yes, they fled
Our banners, as the vapour flies the sunbeam.
And, oh ! when gentle peace came like a bird,
And spread her fond wings over us, my sway
Fell on you lightly, as the wholesome dew—

Where'er the yoke lay sore, old imposts pressed,
I smote them with reforming zeal, and poured
Oil on your wounds, and cherished you to
health.

Now once again iron necessity
Clothes us in sullen armour. Gods approve
Our enterprise. Long-silent oracles
Have spoken with the voice of destiny!
You too, my people, by this acclamation
Fiat our purpose, and invest your prince
With more than regal terrors. Is't not so?

[*People shout.*]

Draw then your swords, bold youth—to arms, to
arms—

As ye do trust to clasp unravished brides,
As ye do hope to see connubial pledges,
As ye would still inherit from your sires
Sweet homes, untrodden by tumultuous war,
I call ye forth to arms.

(*People shout.*) Lead on, lead on
To victory—Julian and victory!

[*JULIAN comes forward with his train.*]

JULIAN.

And now, kind friends, (how pleasant 'tis to be
Environ'd by a living ring of friends)
We have begun with glorious presages.

H

Call in the Prefect's messenger. Well, Sir,
[*Enter Messenger.*
Announce your errand. How stand our armies?

OFFICER.

Bravely.

The Master-General of the frontier, Jovian,
Hath joined our Prefect, Sallust, with his
power,
And crossed the border merrily. We've had
Some sharp encounters; struck some strokes of
valour;
Made many captives and much booty: gained
Opinion, confidence, and happy omens.

JULIAN.

What say you to the foe?

OFFICER.

They've lost all heart,
And, loosened by the terror of our name,
Retreat distractedly; abandoning
Honour and hope, with more substantial things.
'Tis thought, brave Dagalaiphus, by his march
Toward th' Euphrates' springs threatening their
rear,
Secured our daring progress.

JULIAN.

'Twas foreseen, Sir;

And now, good comrades, to your posts. My
people, [altars
When you kneel down at your dear household
Remember those who fight for you. Farewell !
[*Exeunt, populace shouting.*

*The Mines under Perisabor—Workmen hewing the
rock—the roof supported by a large pillar of
rough wood.*

Enter NEVITTA and OFFICERS.

NEVITTA.

Is your work finished yet?

WORKMAN.

To say truth, Sir,
'Twas a hard job, but there's the finishing stroke.

NEVITTA.

'Then is our battle-hour arrived—call forward
The gallants that lead up the storm.

[*Enter Soldiers, with battle-axes and shields, &c.*

After them JULIAN, MAXIMUS, &c. &c.

NEVITTA.

The moments press—when shall we give the
signal?

JULIAN.

Hold ! I have sent in a last summons. Jovian
Returns on the instant : here he comes.

Enter JOVIAN.

JOVIAN.

Alas! Sir,

These men are mad—most obstinately mad!
They yield not, but return us wild defiance.
Yet are they worn to phantoms. Empty streets
And grass-grown portals are more eloquent
Than any language; and the lean, shadowy
 shapes,
That glance at times across the silent courts,
Make most emphatic comment.

MAXIMUS.

Why, 'twould be mercy
To terminate their misery.

JOVIAN.

And yet,
There *are* some that still cling to life. I passed
The gate of a temple: it was thronged with
 maidens
Worn out with famine doubtless, but still lovely.
And there they sat, and sang, and wept, and told
Sad stories, and then wept again. I saw
In an open hall, an old man of fourscore
By his daughter fed on their last loaf—their last:
Ay, o'er that meal he blessed her, and held up
His aged hands, and wished her length of days,

And health, and happiness : thus on the edge
Of a sure grave ! I turned away mine eyes,
And in a corner saw a young man steal
The cool spring draught from his faint, dying
 mother,
And drink :—thus misery deforms our nature !

MAXIMUS.

Nay Jovian, nay—time presses—with your
 pardon
We can hear this at leisure : and, if you please it,
Weep till our hearts break, at your dolorous
 stories.
Pathos can wait.

JULIAN.

Priest ! *you* may have no heart ;
I have : Jovian proceed. Aught else ?

JOVIAN.

 We soldiers
Have but hard hearts at best ; yet there was one
That grated on my pity—a poor female.
Famine had preyed upon her, and it seemed
As if some grief had left her desolate.
She had a baby in her arms, and moved
Slow, with unsteady step, her head declining.
She heard me as she passed, and languidly
Stopped, and, all trembling, turned aside to gaze.

Oh, what a look she gave then ! her dim eyes,
Sunk in their livid chambers, and half hid
'Neath the incumbent lids, were fixed on me
With most intense, painful anxiety.
Tears started, and she turned unto her child,
Kissed it and wept ; then turned to me again,
And seemed with her disparted lips to drink
E'en the least word I uttered. There was about
her

An air that showed she had been beautiful,
And knew it—and a something that denoted
Station and breeding ; and she still was youthful.
But Nature vainly wars with sickness : thus
Want had anticipated time—the sear
Of fallow winter crept upon her roses,
And hunger made her soft cheek hollow and wan.

JULIAN.

Oh, war, remorseless war ! poor gentle creature,
Did she not shrink from thee at last ?

JOVIAN.

Alas !

Despair and sensibility soon sever.
Squalid had grown her dress—her breast was bare,
That infant's fount of life and only pillow.
As thus she looked on me, her baby cried,
(Haply at being unnoticed,) and stretched out

His little hands, and wound them round her
neck,
And stroked down her poor cheek. Thereat she
turned

And gazed upon it wildly, and sank down
Upon her knees and prayed; and to her bosom
Clasped it, and hung her head and wept aloud.

[JULIAN *sits down and covers his face with his
hand.*

MAXIMUS (*regarding JULIAN*).

Nay, if he feels it thus, we are ruined. Give me
The axe and I will tear the mine down.

[*He takes the axe.*

Soldiers!

Remember how you are moulded. Youth of
Greece,

Fight for the honour of old Hellas. Think
Of Marathon in th' onset; and if any
But name retreat, cry out Thermopylæ.
And you, Pretorians! now your Thracian wives
Are gather'd in the Hippodrome, high vaunting
The prowess of their husbands. Men of Italy!
Inheritors of victory! Proud Romans!
Your country eyes you from the Capitol!
Charge, and the Gods be with you.

[*He strikes the base of a column, which giving way, the mine falls in, and above the mass of ruin the interior of the city is seen. Citizens rush to the breach with wild cries. Assault and repulse. JULIAN starts up, drawing his sword.*

JULIAN.

Is the deed done?

Then Romans do your duty.

[*The breach is at length won. The troops pour into the city.*

View of Ctesiphon. Troops pass.

Enter NEVITTA, ANATOLIUS, HORMISDAS, &c.

NEVITTA.

We have had stout marches and a gallant
struggle;

But there's the goal at last. Hail, Ctesiphon!
In sooth, Hormisdas, you have more taste, you
Persians,

Than I had credited.

ANATOLIUS.

'Tis a fair prospect;
Those temples standing out in light, from groves,
With all their pediments and porticos

Glowing amid the sober cypresses,
Look from their hills into the glassy river
Like beauty on her mirror! With what grace
Those accidental shadows from light clouds
Partially veil the distant mass o' the city,
Breaking it to intelligible parts;
Each by its dome, column, or arch of triumph,
Reveal'd to the discriminating sun
With an appropriate beauty!

HORMISDAS.

My eyes fill
To see thee thus, and hear thee praised—my
country!
Yet hast thou been a step-dame unto me.

ANATOLIUS.

Why dost thou look with that sardonic smile,
Nevitta, on this goodly scene? Why, man,
If 'twere a virgin trembling on thy knee
Thy leer could scarce be more portentous.

NEVITTA.

Ha, ha!

Thou talk'st oracularly. It is a scene
That stirs up my barbarian blood within me;—
My Gallic veins this hour—

ANATOLIUS.

I take it now,

Thy thoughts are with forlorn hopes, hot onsets,
Bloody repulses, glorious rallyings;
Torn standards, flying foes, victorious cries;
The strife from street to street, and foot to foot;
And then the final sack—red tongues of fire
Licking the fair walls of yon' palaces—
Their steps well strewn with the rich harnessed
 dead,
Their portals thronged with booty. Then, fair
 matrons
Clinging to altars, with their timorous brood
Of loose-haired virgins crouching down around
 them,
Like scared birds, when the hand is on the
 nest.

NEVITTA.

Soothsayer! thou read'st my eyes, like stars;
 Hormisdas
Thou tak'st this gloomily.

HORMISDAS.

 Would'st have me smile
Upon my country's desolation? Think thou—
Picture Lutetia thus.

NEVITTA.

 Well, Sir, suppose it—
And sixty thousand Persians at the leaguer.

HORMISDAS.

Would you then smile?

NEVITTA.

Ay, Sir, and that I should ;
To think how the accommodating fools
Had come so far to take our yoke—recruits,
Anticipating slaves, to man our gallies.

HORMISDAS.

Hold ! though I be an exile, a poor orphan,
Untimely severed from my parent soil ;
Think you that I'm so heartless as to hear
The voice of scorn unmoved ? Am I so mean
Of lip and arm not to resent it ? Gaul !
I had a country, and I have a sword
That shall protect us both from insult !

NEVITTA.

Give me

Thy hand, brave man : I wronged thee, and re-
pent it.

But see—here's Maximus, that prince of plotters.
I ne'er can read him rightly : he is ever
Clothed in his natural shadows. What now
conceits him ?

Good day t'ye, Priest : what news hast thou ?

MAXIMUS.

Rough soldier,

None that concerneth thee.

NEVITTA.

Whence com'st thou, 'prithce?

MAXIMUS.

From the Emperor's quarters.

ANATOLIUS.

How doth the Emperor?

MAXIMUS.

Well, Sir.

NEVITTA.

Why, Priest, thou hast been tutor'd by an augur.

Thou art as economical of words

As any oracle.

HORMISDAS.

His mind is full then.

When stars are thick in the sky, then is there
silence.

MAXIMUS.

Hast heard of this new Persian fugitive?

Hormisdas! crave your pardon: I was ignorant
Of your much-honoured presence.

HORMISDAS.

Be at ease, Sir;

You touch not me.

NEVITTA.

What! he that hath the bloody scalp? Oh, ay,

This new Zopyrus? He has been closetted
These two hours with the Emperor. A spy!

MAXIMUS.

Humph! say you so? Cæsar thinks otherwise.
There's mischief in that firebrand soldier's eye.

[*Aside.*

Nevitta, I would speak with you. My Lords,
Behold how beautiful is Ctesiphon!
That treasury of unimagined sweets.
Whose very key we hold: the consummation
That tip-toe hope steps up to like a bridegroom.

NEVITTA.

Most eloquent prophet!

MAXIMUS.

Nay, Nevitta, these
Are juvenile temptations. Let us to council.
The Emperor may need advice: his sorrows
Grow thick upon him.

ANATOLIUS.

Ah, the poor Empress! soon
Her weariness will find a bed of rest:
We pitch her tent this evening here.

MAXIMUS.

Perhaps

For the last time—the last! This grief o'er-
whelms him,

Shadowing the light of his mind. Now, Sirs,
these moments

Are pregnant with Rome's fate. Again I say
There lies fair Ctesiphon—but, shall we plant
The limits of our conquest here? or rather
Shall we not bravely pluck the Persian down
From his last hold of refuge?

NEVITTA.

Is it not there—
The last, the noblest?

MAXIMUS.

Oh, Sirs, do you dream
That Sapor there coops up his hopes? Even now
His march is in the desert. Far he flies,
Wild as the tiger from the toils: and shall not
The hunter track his foot-prints? Ay, 'tis his
hope

That Ctesiphon may prove our Capua.

NEVITTA.

Why speak you thus?

MAXIMUS.

This spy—this new Zopyrus,
As you are pleased to call him, but, as Julian
(Wherefore I need not now descant upon)
Deems, a most trusty witness:—(and his wrongs
Speak in his favour)—this poor fugitive Persian

But last night saw their rear-guard pass the gate—
And there were troops of virgins in their train,
(Mark that, Nevitta,) and rich caravans,
Piled with the wealth o' the city: which now lies
A cheat, a sorry trap, a rifled coffer,
A cup, whereof the very lees are drained.
You muse, Nevitta.

NEVITTA.

At your story, Maximus——

If it be true——

ANATOLIUS.

If but in part 'tis true——

NEVITTA.

I know a soldier's duty.

MAXIMUS.

Come to the Emperor.

Rome conquers Sapor now, or fails for ever.

[*Exeunt* NEVITTA, ANATOLIUS, &c.

MAXIMUS.

Now is the bark of Maximus afloat,
Cresting ambition's topmost wave—and bravely
Doth she acquit her to the insulting storm!
Yet is th' adventure dangerous, and needs
A bold and wary pilotry. Take counsel—
Take counsel, Maximus, with thy subtle
thoughts.

How stand thy fortunes? What I seem, I am
not ;

Nor am I what I was, and *shall* be. Men
Envy my greatness, nor conceive it frail.
Yet many wish it so :—therein lies danger.
If I once fall, how many knees, now bending,
Would stamp the heel of hate into my breast !
How many spit their venom on this form !
Take counsel, Maximus ! Thy lofty stand
Is as the eagle's, in the eye o' th' sun.
But is't secure? Or, rather, know'st thou not,
That evén now it fails thee? Julian—no matter
Whether it be he needs me not—or whether,
Even in the full fruition of the crime,
Guilt fears his tempter: or—(why, what's't to
me?)

But, ever since I did that deed on Mark,
I have been shunned. Sapor, what sayest thou?
“ He need not seek the favour of a king
That may be king himself.” Subtle barbarian !
Yet was not this my aim : I sought but *power* ;—
I grasped not at the vanity of things :
I leant on Julian—with his growth I grew :
(’Twas my best hope of rising) now am I shorn
Of that which had contented me, and therefore
Again take counsel for advancement. Sapor—

Yes, I will lead this Julian to thy toils.
So, if he triumphs, I partake the glory,
And re-assume my sway : but if he fails—
Oh ! if there's faith in plots, or zeal in men
For their imagined interests—then, Julian,
The laurel that now wreaths thy warrior-brow,
Shall make pacific diadems for mine. [*Exit.*]

Banks of the Tigris—Distant View of Ctesiphon.

Enter CONSTANTIA, *borne on a litter.* *With her,*
EUSEBIA and Ladies of the Court, &c. *To them*
ANATOLIUS, and OFFICERS meeting.

ANATOLIUS.

Set down the litter gently : much I fear
The length and heat of this day's march too
rudely
Have shaken her soft frame. Madam, the Em-
press [*To EUSEBIA.*]
Is much too slight a flower for these rough days.
Her head bows down, untimely withering,
Like a displanted herb in summer drought.
These warlike toils and strange disquietudes
Suit not her tender nature.

EUSEBIA.

'Tis too true.

How wan she looks—how falteringly she moves.
Mark too her eye—there, where the buoyant
 spirit
Should glance his radiant banner, the drooped
 fringes
Hang like the scutcheons of a broken heart.

ANATOLIUS.

Then is she broken hearted! The night star
Looks not more faded when the morning dawns,
Than she, thus at the gate of opening Heaven.
The heaviness of doom is on her. Oh,
Fate hath a solemn language speaking thus!
Madam, will't please you to alight? We've now
 [*To* CONSTANTIA.

Closed our day's journey.

CONSTANTIA.

Thou say'st true: 'our journey
(And mine has been a weary and a sad one,)
Is like to have swift termination.
Let me look round once more: from this high
 seat
The eye hath 'vantage. 'Tis a goodly scene—
Yon river, like a silvery snake, lays out
Its coil i' th' sunshine lovingly—it breathes
Of freshness in this lap of flowery meadows.
How call you this, my lord?

ANATOLIUS.

The famous Tigris.

CONSTANTIA.

'Tis worthy of report : worthy to have been
The site of empire, nurse of the human race,
Birth-place of mighty actions ! Was it not here
The fathers of mankind, the Patriarchs,
Dwelt with their flocks—Abraham and Israel ?
Was it not here the wise Chaldean shepherd
Leaned on his staff and watched the stars at
night ?

Here too (as holy legends tell) stretched beautiful
The paradise of innocence, the home
Of Eve and Adam, ere they sinned —and here
The iron age had birth. Power first put on
His gauntlet, and earth shook beneath his
tread.

This is the soil of tyranny : the land
Is rank with much pollution. Proud Assyrian,
Where is thy Babel now—thy Nineveh ?
Thy temples and thy palaces, and gates
That poured the tide of men ? It is the tomb
Of nations that we tread on : the vast charnel
Of grandeur—yet without a monument !
The works of man are like himself, vain dust :
Nothing but fame, or good or ill, endures.

EUSEBIA.

Oh, hear her—look on her! so sad, so earnest.
How grand, yet awful, is decaying nature!
Conscious of fate, yet fearless—casting on all
A light, like that of evening, when the shades
Lie deepest. Sweet Constantia, sit you down:
So,—they have smoothed your mantle on this
bank

Here, in the sun for you. Are you not tired?
This rest is sweet.

CONSTANTIA.

Oh, I am sick at heart!
My spirit like its feeble frame. Yes, yes,
The bed of rest is smoothed for me. I never
Shall taste of trouble more.

EUSEBIA.

Nay, now you trifle
With our affections, dearest.

CONSTANTIA.

Think not so.
Look on me as a prophetess. My sight
Is purged: gleams of another world pass over
me,
And I am as the dead. I know it—know it.
Already half the vital heat is gone—
Look on me as a prophetess: Cassandra,

Unheeded in her wilderness of mind ;
In her extreme despair cut off ; yet truly
Telling of woe and ruin—I shall be
Deep in the ground and feel it not.

EUSEBIA.

Sweet daughter,
Pray you suppress these thoughts.

CONSTANTIA.

Where lingers Julian ?
Mine eyes have not looked on him as they should
do,
Now that they have not long to look. His duties
Are not so pressing, but that he might give
Some hours of comfort to a parting soul,
Who for his sake alone loves life. Where is he ?
I have the fearful longing—my short breath
Comes quick with much anxiety. Sweet angels !
Take me not to you till my soul hath seen him,
And poured its bitterness forth in parting tears
Upon his neck, forgiving, blessing, comforting !
Send for him ; send for him : my heart is faint,
Lead me to shade, the sun is hot, fatigue
Hath shaken me—send quickly.

[*They carry her into the tent. Exeunt.*]

A wood—Camp in distance—Moonlight.

Enter MAXIMUS.

The moon descends apace ;—the hour is past
That Nohordates pledged : would it were over !
How calm it is ! no sounds come through the
air,

Though they might pierce the impalpable element
Like light that cleaves the deep of waters. I
Would rather front the whirlwind of the desert,
Or voice of thunder with its wild concomitants,
Lightning and swelling winds and sheeted
rains,

Than this placidity of Nature. Gazing
Thus on yon steadfast stars I could half fancy
That supernatural eyes looked down on me
From the calm depth of Heaven : and this
breathless

Pause in the world's life, seems as if all earth
Lay hushed, that not a sound might interrupt
The ear of the omnipresent Deity.

Why is it thus with me ? I have been wont
To meet all dangers with an equal eye.
I have been steadfast to my mighty aim ;
I have made kings my'puppets ; and religion
A game, through which I grasp a glorious stake.

I have well-weighed my species, and assayed
Their worth, and coined them for mine own
good ends.

All are my tools, and I have laughed at all !
Then wherefore do I feel oppressed? That mad-
man,

Cyrus in aim, shall be in fate Cambyzes :
And like a skilful alchymist, I shall draw
Good from his evil—from his woe my weal ;
From Rome's debasement my advancement:—
Good.

So I am fortune's minion, and hold fate
Reined like a mettlesome steed. I do but lack
This consummation, and the world is mine !
What care I for opinion? He that rules
Is master of opinion—ay, is't so
Indeed? thence hangs much controversy. They
Who doubt, dispute by times, and disputation
Hath other weapons than the tongue. [*Muses.*

Enter NOHORDATES (muffled).

MAXIMUS.

Ho, friend !

Who art thou? speak. [*NOHORDATES uncovers.*

Persian, I welcome thee.

Thou hast been spendthrift of good time, thine
hours

Are most improvident loit'ers.

NOHORDATES.

Curses on him

That guide—but he has paid his penalty.

This hour, the ill-conditioned slave has led me

Through fen and forest, like an *ignis fatuus*.

Yet my debt's paid.

MAXIMUS.

How so, my Lord?

NOHORDATES.

I slew him!

Ay, ay, I deemed him treacherous. Nay—start
not,

We're hasty reasoners in this land o' th' sun;

Quick in our passions, sudden in our anger.

Why muse you? he was but a bondsman.

MAXIMUS.

Satrap,

I will be plain: 'tis not the deed disturbs me,

Nor the condition of the victim, but

The breach of faith this argues. I could pardon

A salutary violence for great ends;

But petty treachery, to wreak despite,

Or sooth a vain fear, that I cannot brook.

Sir, answer not: I'm deep read in men's minds.

Excuse I wave—your anger I regard not.

NOHORDATES.

Well, Maximus, you're master of your thoughts;
Yet let me say, I'd aim my shaft again
At higher game, upon less provocation.
And now to business.

MAXIMUS (*aside*).

Raise the earth-worm up,
And he will threat. 'Tis his mean nature speaks,
And not the King who sent him. Yet, 'twere
well
To pause.

NOHORDATES.

My Lord, you seem dissatisfied.
If aught from my poor lip chafes or offends you,
Think it unsaid. Freely do I disclaim
Words, that so ill give utterance to my heart.
My sovereign sends his gentlest greeting to you;
Health, riches, power, rank, glory; whatsoe'er
Ambition grasps at, or desert secures.

MAXIMUS.

Much have I now, and thank not him: but
softly,
King Sapor promised—(for men cannot be
Too strict, explicit, circumspect, when matters
Of such high import are at issue)—Sapor
Did pledge his signature on certain points

Conditional to our true amity,
To save all future cavil. Your credentials?

NOHORDATES.

Behold ! Peruse these presents ; and besides,
As earnest of the love he holds you in,
He sends this jewel from his hand.

MAXIMUS.

A bauble !

Had I a thought for things like these, the worth
Of thrones had decked my person. I seek not
The toy whose value is conventional :
Power is intrinsic, and commands all else.
That is the heaven my eagle-wing ascends,
The sun mine eye out-dazzles. (*He reads.*) I've
perused
This paper, and am satisfied.

NOHORDATES.

Then quickly

Say, for night wanes, have you prepared the
troops ?

MAXIMUS.

Yes, certain officers. The common men
Love Julian : but there are some I have found
Whose merits, as they judge, have been ill-
weighed ;
Men of some breeding—none more dangerous,

And ripe for any mischief: they are prepared.
Now, mark me: he that to our camp this morn-
ing

Came as a fugitive, was well-received.
He played his hook well, and the bait was
swallowed.

We raise our leaguer of proud Ctesiphon,
And plunge into the desert after you:
Be wary and we 'scape not the decoy.

NOHORDATES.

Oh, fear not—we shall fly you like the sand
Swept by the breeze; till, with its mighty arm,
The storm collects its pillars. Then we crush
you. [Exit.

MAXIMUS.

I care not whom you crush, so I am raised.
Here is my firm assurance—

[Regarding the paper.

I have no choice left.

I cannot still be as I am: my web
Hath been too finely spun with Julian; soon
He cuts it with the sword. And he hath cause,
For I have been his evil genius; made
His conscience but a stepping-stool; and
fashioned

My fortunes by his foibles. He hath been

SALLUST.

Nay, comrades, where's your Roman discipline?
Whom fear you?—I profane your sacred name
In giving utterance to the word! Why, men,
I'm old in arms, and have before swam armed
These famous waves: ay, and I found these
Persians,
These petticoat warriors, these high-plum'd
gallants,
The self-same scrupulous tilters here, fine
fencers,
And delicate dividers of thin air,
As you erewhile have known them. Why, 'tis
but sport,
Mere holiday pastime, thus with lance in rest
To prick them through the meadows: never
hound
And horn went merrier up the green-wood
glade.
Fortune of Cæsar! how their Arabs show
Their paces at a race!

HORMISDAS.

Your pardon, Prefect.
I much applaud your reasoning and your mo-
tives,
But disallow your facts. I've seen our chivalry,

In all the glitter of their jewelled mail,
Their crests afloat, their banners all displayed,
With their wind-footed coursers firm in hand,
Sweep like a tempest up the sward ; their manes
Erect, their light heads white with foam, their
tails

Lashing the hot air with their ample train—
I have seen them thus facing your Roman
squadrons ;
Ay, by my household Gods ! and charged with
them

When they have shown their mettle.

SALLUST.

Gallant Persian,

I saw you not ; yet in a case like this
I do confess I had given my tongue full scope.
Yet pardon me ; and, ere you next reply,
Consider time and place. We've gallants here
Whose valour does not need discouragement.

HORMISDAS.

I've done ; but yet you know my mind—believe
it.

You may unhorse us often, but on this ground
We shall arise refreshed.

NEVITTA.

Then we must strangle you

As in the grasp of Hercules Antæus.

[*Soldiers press forward again.*

MUTIUS.

We have consulted, Generals, and plant here
Our standards. We will go no farther.

Enter JULIAN.

JULIAN.

Say you so?

And who, my talkative friend, art thou? Nay,
man,

Having o'erleaped the mark, like a shamed
panther

Shrink not back, crouching with a cowardly growl:

Mutius, stand forth. I know you, Sir, of old;

A man of dangerous wit and turbulent speech;

Yet loyal, as I deemed, which your promotion

Doth testify. Come, Sir, speak out:—I wait.

MUTIUS.

Cæsar, as deputy of these brave comrades,

I *will* speak, and as doth become a soldier.

[*Soldiers shout and clash their arms.*

We have fought and conquered for you, and we
think

Our toils should have a limit.

JULIAN.

Gentle spokesman,

For Heaven's sake have a care. I'm quick of
temper,
And fearless in decision, as you know.
I have a private grief too that lies heavy
Upon my temper—tempt me not.

SOLDIERS (*from the crowd*).

Brave Mutius,
Speak to our grievance, we'll support you.

MUTIUS.

Emperor !

We love you : but our farthest march is made—
We go no farther.

JULIAN (*drawing his sword, and cutting MUTIUS
down*).

Be it so—who next
Tries the adventure of an orator ?

[*A pause—all remain silent.*]

SALLUST (*aside*).

For Heaven's sake, treat them cautiously.

JULIAN.

Away !

I do despise these demagogues, that fret
The angry multitude: they are but as
The froth upon the mountain-wave—the bird
That shrieks upon the sullen tempest's wing.

[JULIAN *whispers* NEVITTA, *who departs*.]

You dreamed I could be scared by words.

Know, soldiers,

No mortal voice or arm has power o'er Julian.

In him Rome strikes!—fall back into the ranks:

Take up your mutinous officer.

[*Two of the Soldiers remove MUTIUS to the side.*

I'm glad

You are so changed o' th'sudden: would that
the foe

Were near us! By Bellona, I could lead you

Now 'gainst a host of spears. Ha! see you
there!

[*A sudden flash of fire from a ship. The
flame runs from ship to ship till the en-
tire fleet is in a blaze.*

Breathe not a sound, for honour's sake, brave
comrades;

No, not a murmur, on your duty:—now

You have no choice left, all retreat's cut off.

We now must fight our way to peace. Brave
hearts,

Are not these Persians and those fields the same

That quaked beneath the Boy of Macedon?

And what were he (though half our strength) if
boldly

He had not plunged into the dark Granicus?
Soldiers of Rome! what, shall our sons grow
pale

Reading that Grecian story! then for shame
Blush at their fathers' mem'ry? We can die,
And laugh at death upon the field of glory,
But live as recreants—never!

Good Sallust, see that wounded man hath care.
I loved him, though I stabbed him for his crime:
I hope not mortally. Soldiers, to arms!
Hormisdas, lead them to their quarters. March.

[*Exeunt.*]

*Interior of Imperial tent—CONSTANTIA on a couch
—JULIAN kneeling beside her.*

Enter EUSEBIA, cautiously.

JULIAN.

Hush! she sleeps. Hush!

EUSEBIA.

Hath she not wakened since?
Taken no nourishment?

JULIAN.

No: since you left us
She hath been thus. She breathes, you see she
breathes.

EUSEBIA.

Faintly and much oppressed.

JULIAN.

Yet, yet, she breathes :

She lives, I say, Eusebia, and *will* live.Look not thus on me : make me not mad ! nay,
touch her ;You need not fear disturbing her. This stupor
Portends a crisis. True, the pulse is feeble,
And fluttering—but the pulse is there : her hand
Is cold and damp, but there is motion in it.
She pressed my hand just now as if she knew
me ;Nay, stoop down to her lip—kiss, but awake her
not.[EUSEBIA *kisses her*.They're cold—but have some colour yet ! I
thoughtThis moment as I pressed them, a swift hectic
Hurried across her cheek ; but now how pale—
How deadly wan it looks !

EUSEBIA.

Indeed

'Twere best if you withdrew.

JULIAN.

Eusebia,

I quit her not while there is breath, pulse, heat !

[*He gazes wildly on* CONSTANTIA.

I like not the look of her eye, beneath the lid—
Is your hand cool, Eusebia? Lay it here
Upon my brow—that burns. My brain is seared,
My mind is numbed—is numbed. Yet in my
heart

There is a recklessness. Why, I could laugh now!
Is it not strange?

EUSEBIA.

For mercy's sake be calm!

JULIAN.

Why, so I am. Do you not see me calm?
As cold and passionless as any statue—
Still, as the breathless pause before an earth-
quake.

EUSEBIA.

She moves—thank God, thank God! Virgilia,
Haste with the cordial: it refreshes her—
Put it again to her lips. Wipe her damp fore-
head:
She is revived.

CONSTANTIA.

Julian! my husband, Julian!
Oh, Julian, Julian, come to me. Off, off—
You kill me with this weight.

EUSEBIA.

See him, my love.
Your Julian's at your side ; nor hath he quitted it
All this long night.

CONSTANTIA.

Let me look once more on him,
A film is on my sight, [*Endeavouring to see him.*
Oh, my best love !
Thy lineaments are in my heart, or scarcely
Could I now trace them.

JULIAN.

Blessed woman ! tear not
My heart with too much fondness now.

CONSTANTIA (*regarding him fixedly*).

Indeed ?

Then are my moments numbered ! [*Pause.*

Let me bethink me—

Thoughts come on thoughts, crowding across my
mind

Like shadows lengthening in the sunset. God !

Must I be gathered in my youth, and lie

Lonely, forgotten, in a foreign grave ?

And shall I leave none after me, to strew

My early tomb with wild flowers, wet with tears ?

No little hands, no limbs of mine own mould,

Memorials of my lineage, sweet pledges
Of our affection—living comforters
To him who lives, for her who died ! No, no.
Barren—I sink into this barren clay,
My worldly pomp cast to a nameless grave,
My beauty prey to the despoiling worm,
My human love dead in my mortal dust,
My heavenly hopes and my immortal soul
Awaiting the last trumpet ! Yet had I hoped—
(Julian, my husband, kiss me once again)
Yet had I hoped—and oft we talked of this—
To have seen my offspring on its father's knee :
So had I left a living portraiture,
Whose instinct of true love had been to thee
A solace and a memory.

JULIAN (*distractedly*).

I cannot bear this.

[*He rushes out of the tent.*]

CONSTANTIA.

Oh, this is worse for him to bear than me,
But he will not stay from me ?

EUSEBIA.

Surely not :

He will but weep, as we do now, aside ;
And so, being calmed, return.

CONSTANTIA.

My time is short.

Let him not stay—'twould be an agony,
That fruitlessly would haunt his after-thoughts,
That he had 'reft my transitory hour
Of aught that could have soothed a dying pang.

VIRGILIA.

Already he returns——

CONSTANTIA.

Thank God, thank God !

Oh, what a change two years, short years, have
made !

That was my bridal time. We had long loved,
But knew it not—in both it was love's spring ;
And we were young enthusiasts : we felt,
As our minds mingled, that our souls were wed.
One morn, thus linked in thought, as side by side
We sat, his arm around my waist, my hands
Clasped on his shoulder, and my tearful eye
Looking on his, perchance too lovingly ;
He spoke to me of love : and as he spoke
Young roses, born of love and modesty,
Fell on his cheek :—I blushed to see his blushing.

EUSEBIA.

My child, you seem revived ; a gentle colour
Hath touched your cheek o' th' sudden.

CONSTANTIA.

'Tis the rally
Of the spirit to support its trial : even vs
The last light on the mountain top, before
The sun goes down. My maidens, to your
tenderness

I yield this mortal form. Regard it as
Th' unsullied tenement of a pure mind,
If not a strong one. Give it decent rites,
And guard it from rude gaze—no more, he comes,
My Julian ! [*Tenderly.*

Enter JULIAN.

JULIAN.

I could half give way to hope
Thus gazing on thee. (*Kneels beside her.*) Some
new animation
Gleams in thy late dim eyes. Speak comfort to
me.

CONSTANTIA.

There is no comfort on this earth but one :
Wilt thou reject it? There is no hope else,
Julian,
For thee and me. I will not now deceive thee :
Even now, all but my mind and love are dead.
The death-chill creeps up gently to my heart
And that will soon be cold—cold as my limbs.
[*JULIAN exhibits passionate grief.*

My poor, my desolate love, be calm and hear me.
 Death to the Christian is not terrible!
 The dust may perish, but the nobler essence
 Hath an eternal surety. Oh, let me
 Close my poor eyes, in hope to open them
 With thee in a better world! Our parting thus
 Shall lose its sting—parting to meet again.
 Give me this hope, my Julian. It is agony,
 Even the suspense: oh, thou wert strong in virtue,
 And shalt be yet. As thou hast fallen, repent!
 Repent—and God is merciful!
 One moment more, sweet Heaven! I cannot see—
 I cannot hear thee—give me a sign—a kiss—
 In token of——

JULIAN.

Upon thy dying lips,
 Thou blessed saint, I pledge my prostrate soul.

CONSTANTIA.

Now I die happy—remember!

*[She reclines back, folding her hands as in
 prayer, her eyes closed.]*

EUSEBIA.

Sing her that hymn,
 That she once loved, she yet perchance may
 hear it;
 She is not dead, but sleeps.

Chorus of Virgins.

Gentle Spirit, that would'st fly,
Seraph, through the pathless sky;
Winging onward to thy rest,
Like a wild bird to its nest;
As thou art without offence,
Peaceful be thy passage hence!

Go, and happy Souls befriend thee,
And thy virtues shall attend thee.
Now, assoiled from mortal taint,
Take thy blessed way, sweet saint,
Through the spheres by angels trod,
To the presence of thy God!

All are doomed to death; but all
Shall wake at the last trumpet call—
The past recall'd, the dead arrayed;
And then the world itself shall fade—
But not all with it. The pure Spirit
Shall the crown of life inherit!

Spirit, in thy virtue free,
Peaceful may thy passage be!

*An open Grove ; beyond which, over a screen of
underwood, is seen a sandy desert.*

*Enter tumultuously groups of Soldiers, worn as if by
long travelling. After them, NEVITTA, JOVIAN,
and other OFFICERS, expostulating. Then MAXI-
MUS.*

NEVITTA.

Shame on you !

By glorious Mars ! comrades, I shame to see you.
Why, scarce a week since and ye laughed to
scorn

These paltry Persians. You were as weary then
With toiling through these deserts, as ye now are.
Stand to your arms I say, cowards ! or forfeit
Your Roman name for ever.

MAXIMUS.

They are brave, Sir,

As you or any man : I will avouch it
Spite of your ready frown. Ay, is the scene
Unchanged indeed ? These wastes were wild
and lonely

Before, as they are now : but we could brave
them

When marching to imagined victory.

Now——

A SOLDIER.

Why, look there, my masters: look yon' track
Lined out along the desert by our ruin.
What see you there? dead horses, dying men,
Women, that to the shattered carriages
Cling shrieking—and afar the coming spoiler!
Here do we stand the while, poor worn anatomies,
Fit for death only.

MAXIMUS.

'Tis too true, Nevitta.
We have been cozened, idiots as we were,
By flatterers, madmen, traitors.

SOLDIER.

Why are we here?
Seek Sapor in the desert? Ye should have
known it
Before ye risked men's lives. A lonely traveller
Upon that drear expanse picks up with pain
A scanty meal. Ay, the half-loaded camel
Staggers beneath the burning atmosphere.

MAXIMUS.

True, my poor fellow, true. We are stout
soldiers,
But perishable men.

NEVITTA.

As soldiers, therefore,

Hearken to me—leave cowards to repine
O'er our undoubted evils. Yonder's the foe.
Come on, brave hearts: let's toss these baiting curs
As bulls do from their horns.

MAXIMUS.

My counsel, comrades,
Is peace, is peace. Why should we perish?
wherefore?

To sooth the vanity of one rash man?
The hot air smells of carnage—shall we die
On points of ceremony?

NEVITTA.

Art thou mad?
Be silent: you unman us when we need
Firm courage most.

MAXIMUS.

I say, 'tis peace we need—
Bread, water, sleep. These now were worth an
empire. [*A trumpet sounds.*]

NEVITTA.

Now, if there's half a Roman heart among you,
To arms, to arms! stand to the foe.
[*Persian cavalry gallop, shouting beyond the
bank of underwood.*]

Voices within.

A spring!

A spring, a spring! water—a spring, a spring!

[Soldiers all rush to the side.

Enter JULIAN.

JULIAN.

Oh, brave companions! Where would they fly,
Nevitta?

NEVITTA.

They have found a spring. *[MAXIMUS retires.*

JULIAN.

Is this a time? hold, hold!
Romans! dear comrades of a thousand fields,
Return—the foe's upon us. Soldiers, soldiers!
Shame not our ancient glories—face to the enemy.
What, will you leave your General? By the Gods!
I plant my foot here, be't for life or death.
Now, if you dare, abandon me. Dear friends,
I know you, and fear nought!

[Soldiers gather round him and applaud, clashing their arms.

We'll lash these jackalls
Back to their desert: then, oh, then! how sweetly
Will taste these waters to our weariness.
(*Tumultuous cry of Soldiery*). A charge! huzza,
huzza! Julian, Julian!

[All rush off the scene; clash of arms and shouts. The Persians fly back, pursued.

Re-enter JULIAN, NEVITTA, &c.

JULIAN.

Thanks, gallants, we have bravely chidden
them—

Bravely. Now where's the spring? a clear,
cool draught

Of water trickling from a rock, or gushing
Its bubbling way through the green grass, were
worth

Beakers of wine at the full board of peace.

[Soldier brings in water—offers it to JULIAN.]

JULIAN.

Nò, my good friend, no. While a man of you
Thirsts, not a drop for me: my brave Nevitta,
Drink thou. Nay, I command. You, Anatolius,
And you, and you, and you—so, my turn
next.

A brimming helmet, mind ye.

NEVITTA.

Oh, Sir, thus ever

To our wants you postpone your own: ay, ever.
Heaven shield us from ingratitude!

JULIAN.

Amen!

But some there are—I had one in my eye
Even as I entered.

NEVITTA.

Ah, the hypocrite!

JULIAN.

No more—but keep an heedful eye upon him.
The day is come, Nevitta, when we shall need
Our noblest energies. Then 'ware all traitors!
Here is a glorious field to act war's tragedy.
We've won a night of rest: hail to a morning
Of final, desperate strife.

NEVITTA.

Thanks to the Gods!

I hear of battle once more.

[*A Soldier brings water to JULIAN.*

JULIAN.

Comrade, your hand:—

I thank you: ay, that draught is pure and
wholesome.

I am a man again. Where's Anatolius?

Ha, Anatolius! (*To him, entering.*) Dagalaiphus
—all,

I'm glad we meet. Eusebia—where is she?

ANATOLIUS.

Her tent is safe beside the welcome springs:
She has a noble courage.

JULIAN.

It was ever so.

Look to her, Anatolius, when I'm gone.

ANATOLIUS.

Oh, Cæsar, wherefore?

JULIAN.

Nay, nay, let that rest.

Old Sallust, in these gorges, we confront
The peril, like bold Romans.

SALLUST.

Our thin ranks

May here make head—here only.

JULIAN.

Sallust, I feel

A weight beyond my sorrows in my heart.
If aught befall me—well, well—only thus much ;
Should I fall, choose the worthiest. Now to our
tent.

To each I give his charge, and then good night,
And may sweet sleep restore you. [*Exeunt.*

Morning—a Camp in the mountains.

Soldiers before the imperial tent.

Enter NEVITTA, HORMISDAS, ANATOLIUS,

SALLUST.

NEVITTA.

The sun will soon arise : yon dusky mountain
Lifts his great outline hard against the light.
There are no clouds ; the air is crisp and jocund ;
And rosy fingers now are shaking out
Aurora's golden hair.

SALLUST.

'Tis strange to think
With what indifference does our mother Nature
Behold this worldly stage. She sits unmoved
While nations are extinguished, kings dethroned,
The temples of the Gods subverted. Equal
To her our joys or sorrows—they are but shadows,
Passing and passed, upon the glass of time !
Yet, is not this a day when she might drop
Some tears, and clothe her limbs in darksome
weeds ?

For now two nations meet in mortal quarrel,
Two crowned brows frown terrible defiance,

Two mighty armies crowd one narrow field,
Two Faiths contend for empire.

NEVITTA.

Hark, I hear
The adverse trumpets sounding, and the clash
Of cymbals, echoing through those winding
mountains.
They speed a gallant summons.

ANATOLIUS.

Has the Emperor
Yet risen? Who has seen him? He should
wake
Haply from his last slumber.

SOLDIER.

Hush, my lord :
Great Julian sleeps not ; all this morn I heard
His step in motion ; more than once he came,
All pale and solemn, to the tent door and gazed
Upon the stars. Once, as I paced aside,
His eye seemed wet—it had a wat'ry sparkle.

OFFICER.

The sentinel that walked the midnight watch
Tells a strange tale. The Emperor slept
alone,
Yet were two voices heard within the tent
At the dead silent hour.

SOLDIER.

Ay, and he says
A figure, wrapt in tomb-like vestments, passed
Shadowy across the portal, soundless and swift.

ANATOLIUS.

'Tis credibly on record that great men
Have had strange warnings—that their souls,
 sublimed
From all mean matter, have held communing
With disembodied beings. Brutus met
Dead Cæsar at Philippi.

SALLUST.

If 'tis decreed,
The summons is for all—our web of life
Is mingled with his thread;—the gloomy Sisters
Will close their shears at once on all. Look round,
The mountains hem us in one common tomb—
We can but choose 'twixt famine and the sword.

Enter JULIAN.

NEVITTA.

Hail to thy bright sun, my imperial master!
It lights us to our labours smilingly.

HORMISDAS.

'Tis a good omen: hail, all-conquering prince!
Shake not thy head—all will be well yet.

SALLUST.

Flatterer!

This is no time, (albeit our eyes are heavy
With watching, pain, and long anxiety,)
To shut them on the danger: it is broad
And imminent.

ANATOLIUS.

I am content to die
For thee, dear sov'reign, and th'old Roman honour,
And I rejoice the sun looks out to see us
Fall, like the Spartans with Leonidas.

JULIAN.

When men do feel but small hope to confront
The sun-set with their living eyes, methinks
Good day would be an idle ceremony.
Not one of you hath said to me, good day:—
This saying not, ye mean to say—farewell!

Enter JOVIAN.

JOVIAN.

Arm, arm, my prince,—around, on every side,
The Persian hosts unfold their countless squad-
rons,
From their primeval forests issuing:
I think there's not a Parthian bow unstrung,
Or an Assyrian cuirassier unhelmed

For this encounter.

JULIAN.

Well, well, be it so—

We shall have gorgeous rites and many mourners.

NEVITTA.

Nay, think not thus: our soldiers ere to-night
Shall tear rich booty from the runagates,
Bright golden comforters from comely corpses.
Hark to the Gothic trumpet! how it starts

[*Sound of Trumpets.*

- Thick-coming, on the freshening gusts of air.
Anon our Gauls wind their deep cornet's breath
With a most manly music.

JOVIAN.

Look, my Lord.

There, by yon point of wood, (the dizzy road
Emerging round the cliff) half lost in shadows,
The stream of living war rolls slowly on.
Their bright array makes the pulse bound again,
Havoc ne'er marched 'neath such a panoply.

NEVITTA.

Gods, what a gleam of armour! how their crests
Toss, and their saucy banners flout the sky.
How I do burn to give my horse the rein,
And loose my Gallic hounds upon them!

JULIAN.

Ay,

They are a noble quarry, meet companions
To sleep to-night with us on clay-cold pillows.

Enter MAXIMUS.

MAXIMUS.

Let those woo death who have in life no hope,
And hug the ghastly comforter, Despair !
They fear a fall who take too bold a leap—
His head grows giddy that is perched too high.
The Persian speaks us fair—say, shall we fling
Our bodies to the trampling elephant,
And call it glory to be trod to death ?

JULIAN.

Old priest, I pray thee step aside and tempt not
An angry nature in extremity.
Thou tread'st upon a serpent.

MAXIMUS.

Man-God ! who
Shall chide but the infallible ? Art thou
So sinless, so omnipotent ? Who led
Rome's armies to these Caudine forks ? Earth
yawns :

Thou should'st leap in, like Curtius—and alone.
Where is our hope ? If ye join battle now,
So shall ye never see your native land,
Beside the sunny banks of Hellespont !

If ye submit, (I speak advisedly,
With undefiled honour, sound discretion,)
So shall ye clasp your longing wives again
And dance light-laughing babes on welcome
knees.

JULIAN.

Away, I'll hear no more.

MAXIMUS.

There have been men
Have seen strange prodigies—the sky last night
Was flushed with meteors. I myself beheld—

JULIAN.

Thou paltering priest, I do reject the omen.
Coward ! thou dost betray us : cease, or mark me,
I'll hang thee on that blasted tree, thou raven !
Go—grovel, slave, before thy recreant Gods,
I supplicate from them no hopeless succour.
The arrow-flight shall be our lightning's flash,
The hoofs of charging squadrons rattling thunder,
And, for Jove's eagles, we'll have Roman stan-
dards

Hovering above the foaming surge of battle,
To fright the wild eye of pale-visaged war.

MAXIMUS.

Good—but when thronging javelins bear thee
down,

And hunt thee like the lion to the toils,
How shalt thou 'scape the doom? There is no
way.

JULIAN.

Byzantine! dost not know our Roman way?
When Brutus saw his legions at Philippi
Broken, he fell upon his sword and died.
Cato survived not freedom. Antony
Set free his prisoned soul and laughed at bondage.

[*Shouts within—blasts of trumpets.*]

JOVIAN.

Hark! th' advanced guards meet. These are
their trumpets.

JULIAN.

Who leads the Persian host to-day?

NEVITTA.

I saw

The trappings of the royal elephant
Gleam in the sun-set yesterday—they rode
So close upon our rear, we startled them
With a salute of arrows.

JULIAN.

Gallant companions,
This is no time for words: our deeds to-day
Shall speak our eulogy or epitaph.

I need not counsel Romans to be brave.
Or lecture veterans on points of duty ;
Remember all you fight for—think of those
You shall re-visit soon, in shame or glory ;
Or, dying, leave the hero's heritage—
Undying reputation. Choose, and nobly,
Chains or the arch of triumph—death or slavery !
[*The cry of onset heard.*
Away, away !

Field of Battle.

The Romans fly across the field.

Enter ANATOLIUS, wounded.

ANATOLIUS.

Leave me, soldiers—leave me to die : my sands
Ebb quickly, and my sluggard pulse beats faint.
Leave me to die. (*He falls.*) To die ! nay, stand
not round me,
You keep my flitting soul in bondage—fly
To some more hopeful rescue. [*They leave him.*
Treachery !
Oh, treachery, treachery ! villainous treachery !
[*Enter MAXIMUS, leading a band of Persians,*
with MERANES.

ANATOLIUS.

Behold the spotted viper ! Maximus—ho !
Traitor !

MAXIMUS.

Who calls me with that voice of death
And contumelious taunting ? Anatolius !
Ha, art thou scotched, thou snake ? I toss thee
back
Th' injurious epithet ! Thou smil'dst to-day,
When Julian chid me in the midst of you—
It glutteth me to see thee dying.

ANATOLIUS.

Stay !

Yet ere I die. Oh, fate, a little strength !
And hear me curse thee—curse thee, Maximus !

[Dies.

[Enter JULIAN, chasing the Persians. Seizes

MAXIMUS and flings him down.

JULIAN.

[Lifting his sword and treading him down.
Thou complicated traitor ! have I caught thee ?
What ! in the very crime, reeking with guilt,
All leprous in thy pestilent infamy ?
Ha, hell-hound ! not a word ?

MAXIMUS.

Spare me, spare me !

JULIAN.

Blood-sucking parricide ! with hands just dipped
In thy sold country's slaughter, nam'st thou
mercy ?

Thou Judas ! purchased with the dross of earth !
Ay, twine thy trembling fingers round my blade
And pray to me with thy convulsed lips—
Stare with distended eye on certain death—
Writhe in thy pangs, they are my consolation.
By all the ghastly spectres of past crimes !
By all the broken hearts thou'st made ! By all
The dark mementos of this bosom, standing,
Demons of wrath, around us ! I devote
One sacrifice to vengeance ere I die,
One victim more to direful Nemesis.
Bear witness, Heaven and Hell—I dedicate
(Nay, look upon me, wretch, before I kill thee)
Thy reeking blood to the infernal Gods.
There—let me look on thee, poor dog ! now die.

[*Stabs him. Exit.*]

Persian Camp.

SAPOR. MERANES, NOHORDATES, *Generals of his
Army. Officers, Satraps, &c.*

SAPOR.

Hath Julian 'scaped? Nay, then this sea of
slaughter

Is a vain deluge. Dastards! I had set
My heart on caging this vile Roman braggart,
Like a wild panther. I would have shown the
world

How wild beasts may be tamed.

Curse on ye, Dastards! Did I not command
All sacrifice, all lavish waste of life,
Dead or alive to take him?

MERANES.

Gracious Sov'reign,
Deeds have been done this day that put to shame
The Greek romance of Hercules.

NOHORDATES.

Eyes ne'er saw
So deathful an encounter as ensued
When the Immortals charged: one spirit
seemed
In horse and man—they swept the dusty plain

Like the prodigious Centaurs. In the midst
These eyes saw Julian fall.

SAPOR.

Where is his head?
If ye have killed him, where is his head? I tell ye
I would have had it stuffed with precious spices
And stuck upon a pole within my chamber,
And solaced me with daily contemplation—
Ay, laughed to see death incorruptible!
Thus would I make mine enemy immortal!

[*A wounded Officer brought in.*]

OFFICER.

Great Lord of Earth! here's one who hath
escaped
I' th' heat of battle, from the enemy's ranks;
His tale may chance direct us.

SAPOR.

What is he?

OFFICER.

A leader of a gallant band, surprised
Last night by th' enemy, ambushed near their
camp:
His wounds attest good service.

SAPOR.

Speak and quickly,
Of Julian—speak!

WOUNDED OFFICER.

I saw the great Apostate
Gallantly bearing up his fallen fortune
Through half the day.

SAPOR.

Speak to the purpose, idiot !

WOUNDED OFFICER.

I stood beneath a rock, a jutting rock,
That screened the plain on which his vanguard
formed ;
Thither he came, and that proud woman with
him,
The Macedonian Queen, Eusebia,
Armed like Bellona. He was calm and solemn :
She too was pale—her white lips were com-
pressed ;
While her quick eyes glanced round, 'neath
lowering brows,
Half vengeance, half despair. Just then they
parted,
He sprang upon his horse.

NOHORDATES.

I marked the despot—
Even like an arrow on the wind, he rode
His winged courser, and with noble daring
Swept with his chivalrous escort past our front,

Even at the stormy edge of chafing battle.
Our arrows touched him not, his life was
 charmed !

Sudden he reined his horse up, raised his helmet,
And shouting thrice aloud, waved his bare hand.
A chosen troop rushed forward—then he turned
His charger round, and in short circle wheeling,
With a loud cry triumphantly rushed on us.

MERANES.

He seemed a super-human presence, fraught
With an unearthly valour, demon phrensy !
A fiend was surely in his heart and arm ;
Satanic majesty was in his eye.
The war-mist rolling round him ; his keen sword
Flashed like hot lightning, bright and terrible—
He seemed as moving in a thunder-cloud.

NOHORDATES.

And that black horse—an hellish birth was he
 too.

I saw his gaping nostrils red with fire,
A foam of gore he tossed from his dark jaws,
In his reverted eyes blazed swarthy flames.
His proud hoofs, as they pawed the air and struck
Sparks from the spurned earth, seemed shod in
 Hell
With penal steel.

MERANES.

'Twas so—and his sad bearing,
When some good sword struck his crowned
helmet off,
Did well become that thought. His teeth were
clenched,
His cheeks were bloodless, and his hollow eyes
Dark with accumulated agony.
Yet were his features passionless—a calm
And terrible despair, a marble stillness,
(As if some inward fire had charred his heart,)
Looked out from him immovable. Most awful!
Dread contrast with the tempest of that hour!

SAPOR.

Why, this is well—though somewhat more of
praise
Haply than he deserves. Yet does his fame
Augment our glory : know ye no more?

OFFICER.

I saw him
Headlong on earth, rolled from his dying horse,
That foundered o'er a heap of carcases.
He fell : just then a trooper suddenly
Reared his stout horse, half turned, and, back-
ward leaning,

M

Thrust down his lance and pinned him to the
ground.

I saw him rise against the mortal steel
And wrench it in the wound like a spent tiger;
Then, heaving on his knee, with backward stroke
Hamstring the horse, that with a plunge, fell
prone.

Stunned by the fall, his rider lay all senseless;
When Julian freed plucked forth the shaft and
leaped

Upon his breast and stabbed him. Some few
friends

Rushed to the rescue and I saw no more:
Yet do I think that javelin's point was edged
With fate, and full of death.

SAPOR.

There's gold for thee,
Thy tidings are the best. Now, forward—for-
ward,
Storm their proud camp: I will not leave a
Roman
To tell the tale.

MERANES.

Pause, conqueror of kings,
Thy troops are faint with carnage. Havoc has left
Strange chasms in our battalia.

SAPOR.

Slave! I ask not
The Gods to spare men's lives: 'tis victory
That I command. Forward, I say.

[*Exeunt.*]*Imperial tent—distant field of battle.*EUSEBIA. *Ladies of her Court.*

1ST LADY.

Where shall we fly?

2nd. There's no escape.

3rd. Oh, death!

Oh, worse than thousand deaths—where shall
we fly?

1st. I see some tossing helmets yonder—
there.

2nd. Are not those clashing swords? Hark!

1st. Where's the guard?

Agony, agony! no help is near:
They have left us in our feebleness.

EUSEBIA.

Alone?

Lone women left in war's extremity?

No hope? Why, then, no fear!

1st. We'll kneel to them—

We'll clasp their limbs, and weep and pray for
life.

EUSEBIA.

We cannot live with honour.

3RD LADY.

Can we escape?

EUSEBIA.

I know but one way left—Lucretia!

[They shrink and gaze on each other.]

Ay, death, death, death!

*[As they retreat into the tent, enter JULIAN,
borne in wounded. With him NEVITTA
and others.]*

HORMISDAS.

Softly, he bleeds at every step—death's dew,
The clammy witness of these mortal pangs,
Stands cold upon his forehead. Hold—his eye
Within the half-shut lid looks dim and frozen;
The hand that held so fast relaxes: hold—
He dies.

NEVITTA.

Nay, let me look upon him—softly,
He is not dead: so, lay him down. The motion
Just gave a momentary faintness—see,
The ray is not extinguished in his eye—
There's colour on the lip.

HORMISDAS.

He makes a sign—

Soldier, go fetch some water in your helmet—

See it be clear from blood.

EUSEBIA.

Where is the Emperor?

Where is my Julian?

HORMISDAS.

See him there!

EUSEBIA.

Woe, woe!

Look on me, look on me, Julian—hear me, hear
me!

Julian! Augustus! Cæsar!

NEVITTA.

These are names

Breathed in a deaf ear: music that hath lost

All concord, all imagined harmony

For death's decaying intellect.

[*Soldiers bring water. JULIAN drinks.*]

JULIAN.

Eusebia!

Art thou here too? Still greater than thy sex,
Thou com'st to view a sad and awful parting,
The spirit that deemed half the world too small,
Torn from its lordly habitation,

Crushed in its vigour, hurled from its high throne,
Cast naked on eternity—to stand
With common souls before the Judgment-seat !
[*A distant shout heard. JULIAN starting on
his feet.*

Where am I? Bind me on my horse! to arms!
Slaves! shall I die upon a couch? A myriad
Of agonising thoughts throng in my brain.
Oh, for a bloody bank, a broken sword,
And banners drooping o'er me!—Vengeance!
Some vengeance yet! To horse! I say—upon
them!

I tell ye I am strong. A lightning rushes
Through my hot veins would swell a thousand
pulses.

[*Sinks down exhausted.*

Ha, ha, ha, ha! Look on these traitor limbs;
Oh, hear this braggard voice! Nevitta, thou
Hast seen this clod of earth true to its spirit?
I've not been a vain boaster always?

NEVITTA.

Emperor,
I've swam the gulphy Rhine with thee at mid-
night,
Beneath a canopy of fiery darts:
I've plunged with thee into the tide of men

When every living wave was swoln with fate ;
Yet never shrank before—'tis terrible.

[JULIAN *leans forward with a fixed look.*

JULIAN.

How many of ye stand around me ? late
I saw but three.

EUSEBIA.

There are no more : Nevitta,
Hormisdas, and myself.

JULIAN.

There is a fourth,
Look—don't you see him ? shadowy—look—
there, there—

He comes to me. Thou supernatural shape !
Vast, gloomy, silent, undefinable !
I saw thee at Eleusis. Thou didst look
Last night upon my troubled sleep : I heard
Thy rustling folds departing. Still and dark
Is the dread meaning of thine awful eye !
Art thou the Spirit of Judgment, that doth write
Man's doom upon the adamantine book ?
Or, with thy basilisk presence dost thou come,
Wrath-executing Minister ! to watch
Lost souls just flitting from the gates of life ?
Speak to me—speak to me !

[*He sinks back in a stupor.*

NEVITTA.

His senses wander.

It is most awful. Saw you aught, my Lord?

HORMISDAS.

No, nothing : yet methinks a rustling passed us,
A swift division of the air—a sound;
As of departing wings.

JULIAN (*recovering*).

Eusebia!

Thou art the last tie I have left on earth :
I would look on thee once again—thy features
Remind me of past happiness:—no matter ;
I fashioned my own fortunes. Turn me—so.
Turn me upon my side : 'tis well ; I'm easier.
The blood flows freely now ; my pains are
deadened :

Come near. I'm somewhat numbed, and heavy,
heavy—

Cold, very cold, and dark, Eusebia !
Give me some air—breath, breath—some air,
some air.

Bear me—where I—can see—the sun :

[*They bring JULIAN forward : he fixes his eye
upward.*

“ Oh, Galilean ! Thou hast conquered me ! ”

[*He sinks through their arms and expires.*

NOTE.

ONE or two passages in one of the earliest of the foregoing Scenes, are derived from my recollection of an old tract written with an atrocious power of language. To the matter of this writer I involuntarily fashioned the savage principles I had to ascribe to Maximus. I am not aware of having in any other part of my Poem adopted the ideas of any other writer. I have certainly had no model present to my imagination: and have only from a distance, and with reverence, regarded those admirable writers who were the founders, and remain the glory, of our dramatic literature.

In my general sketch only have I sought to adhere to history. I have varied from it in many details. For instance, the mode of attack by which Maojamalcha was reduced, I have applied to Perisabor; principally, I believe, because the former name is not of easy pronounciation.

THE DUKE OF MERCIA.

TO
STEPHEN EDWARD RICE, Esq.

&c. &c. &c.

AS A MEMORIAL OF GRATITUDE

FOR AN INESTIMABLE GIFT,

THIS DRAMA

IS DEDICATED BY HIS SON-IN-LAW,

THE AUTHOR.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

EDMUND, *surnamed Ironside, King of England.*

CANUTE, *son of Sweyn, King of the Danes.*

EDRIC STREON, <i>Duke of Mercia,</i>	}	<i>Brothers-in-law of Edmund.</i>
UTHRED, <i>Earl of Northumberland,</i>		
EUSTACE, <i>Earl of Bulloign,</i>		

EDWY, *surnamed The Churl, Brother of Edmund.*

ETHELMAE, *Earl of Cornwall, friend of Edric.*

OSMER, *the Bastard.*

MORCAR, SIGIFERTH, <i>Danish Lords,</i>	}	<i>Friends of Edmund.</i>
FRITHEGIST, <i>a Saxon Lord,</i>		

GOTHMUND,	}	<i>Danish Nobles, Officers of Canute.</i>
TURKILL,		
ANLAFFE,		

EMMA, *Queen of Ethelred the Second, King of England.*

ALGITHA.

SWEYN, <i>King of the Danes.</i>	}	<i>In the Introductory Scenes only.</i>
GUNILDA, <i>his Daughter.</i>		
<i>A Lady, attendant upon her.</i>		

*Saxon and Danish Officers. A Poet, Masquers,
Minstrels, &c.*



THE DUKE OF MERCIA.

INTRODUCTORY SCENES.

The Sea-shore. A boat approaches the land; from which descend SWEYN, CANUTE, GOTHMUND, TURKILL, ANLAFFE, &c. &c.

ANLAFFE.



HE Saints be praised ! we're on dry
land again.

GOTHMUND.

Ay, and have bid the tempest brave
defiance.

Welcome unto these famous shores of Cornwall;
Welcome, my liege !

CANUTE.

It bears a winning aspect ;

N

This deep and sunny bay, round whose broad
bosom
The leafy cliffs wind their umbrageous arms,
As if they loved the element that woos
Their rugged feet with all its crowding billows.
How sportively they toss their foaming tresses,—
And on their bright cheeks give a quick reflection
To all that look upon them ! But, my liege,
My royal father, you look pensively
On that which stirs up thus my youthful blood.
Is your grace well ?

SWEYN.

Ay, my brave son, yet sad ;
Sad, and without a cause. Those raging seas
Have left a heaviness upon my eyes,
A weight upon my heart.

ANLAFFE.

Fling it off, thus—
As I throw out my arms to thee, fair England,—
Thou glorious land of hope !

CANUTE.

See, every bough
Nods welcome to the fearless and the free.
The green fields, in this glow of setting sun.
Smile with a present promise : the blue moun-
tains

Look through the calm serenity of air
With eyes of hope upon us;—ay, these sounds
Of winds and waters breathe a stirring music,
As the swell of a trumpet on a battle-field;
Or, in their milder mood, like the sweet close
Of virgin-voices singing holy hymns.

SWEYN.

Now, to my ears, it hath a fall of sadness,
Most melancholy, full of mournful omens;
And greets our raven-banner with a note
As boding as the emblem.

CANUTE.

Sir, you wrest
All nature from her true intent. Indeed
You are not well. Vainly our sails have panted,
Fill'd with the strong gales of our swelling for-
tune,
If now you droop.

GOTHMUND.

My Lord, look cheerily.
We Northmen soon are thaw'd in this soft
climate.
Sweet smells the moist breath of this bloomy
bank,
Born amid odours.

SWEYN.

Sirs, I wish you joy
Of your young spirits, that can quit grave
thoughts

As the grub casts its scale off in the sun,
And wings the air a butterfly, and lives
On light and flowers. I have the eyes of age,
And have learn'd wisdom from unwelcome
masters,

Drawn prescience from the lessons of the past,
And judgment from most sorrowful experience.
There is a shadow now before my eyes
Ye cannot see; there is a voice that hangs
On these thin winds, a tongue amid these trees,
Ye hear not: ay, an awful presence dwells
Among us now, ye feel not;—but I feel it.
It has been thus before, and evil days
Have follow'd after.

GOTHMUND.

Soft, my Lord, here comes
A courier, and in haste; and, as I think,
By his pale face, a messenger of evil.

Enter COURIER.

SWEYN.

Said I not true, my Lords? Well, Sir, you bring

News from our friends ; ill news, I fear. I pray
you,
Speak ; are we timely landed ? speak, Sir, I
pray.

COURIER (*kneeling*).

Alas ! a choking grief ties up my tongue.
Timeless, yet timely art thou come, King
Sweyn.

Timeless to save, yet timely to avenge.
Death, bloody death, hath been before.

SWEYN.

My son,
Let me sit down upon this bank : a sickness,
Death-cold, hath ta'en me suddenly, and makes
My limbs weak. Speak !—my daughter ?

COURIER.

Sir, she lives.

SWEYN.

Just Heaven, I thank thee !

COURIER.

Still Gunilda lives ;
But lives to pray for death. Her wandering feet
Journey close after me, scarce knowing whither.
But she would seek her father's neck with tears,
And rend her widow'd hair out in his arms,
And beat her childless bosom at his feet.

SWEYN.

Dread words are these thou speak'st! How has
this been?

COURIER.

Oh, Sir, the Saxon sword has been well blooded!
And cruel Edric——

CANUTE.

Where is my sister? Say!

COURIER.

I left her in a dark glade of the woods,
Some furlongs hence; in wayward fancy chosen,
As a meet place, she said, for broken hearts.
Old, ivied oaks, mossy with age, and grey
With the unwholesome lichen, shut out the sun
From the long wiry grass, dock-weed, and hem-
lock,
That droop beneath.

SWEYN.

I'm somewhat now revived;
Lead to my daughter.

CANUTE.

And, as we journey onward,
Recount thy dreadful tale from first to last.

[*Exeunt.*

A dark glade in a wood. GUNILDA seated on a bank; her appearance wild and disordered. A Lady in attendance.

LADY.

Sweet Madam, speak! Oh, for the love of Heaven!

Let me but hear that blessed voice again.

She will not answer me! she hears me not!

What can I do? No help near,—not a creature,—

No human thing to comfort us. Great God!

What if her brain should madden? Dear, dear

Lady!

The night is growing chill; we have no shelter.

Look up,—how dark the clouds are! Pray arise!

Let's leave these gloomy caverns of arch'd

boughs;

The lightsome fields will make you better.

Come,—

It is no place for living things.

GUNILDA.

My children!

Oh, my poor little ones! my husband

LADY.

Nay,
For mercy's sake, forbear that theme. I hear
The tramp of horsemen hitherward. Alas!
How desolate we are!

Enter SWEYN, CANUTE, and suite.

Kind Heaven be praised!
I have not pray'd in vain.

SWEYN (*embracing GUNILDA, who remains
unmoved*).

My sweetest daughter—
Gunilda! look on your old father; hear me;—
I come to thee weigh'd down by age and sorrow,
Yet strong enough to share thine too. Look on
me—
Oh God! all sense has fled.

CANUTE.

Let me speak, Father.
My sister—my Gunilda—dost not feel
Thy brother's faithful arm around thy waist?—
She heeds not,—no, her mind is warp'd from
earth,
And her eye gleams with visionary wildness.
See what a sad smile gathers on her lip—
Her dream is now of heaven, her children's
home.

Such, 'twere scarce mercy to disturb.

SWEYN.

Not so :

Oh, let not madness feed on that sweet heart !
Those features, now so pale and passionless,
That dim eye, fix'd in awful calmness thus,
Portend tempestuous sallies yet. Arouse her,
Or she is lost for ever.

CANUTE.

Dearest sister !

Look on the grey hairs of thy father !—see him,
An old man weeping as a child ; a soldier
Even like a woman grieving. Is't not strange
A father thus should meet his living child ?
'Tis thus we mourn the dead.

GUNILDA.

The dead—the dead ?

Ay, all that live must die,—what matter when ?
If soon, then happy !—who art thou—and thou ?

SWEYN.

Gunilda !

GUNILDA.

Hark !—that voice !—hark !—Oh my father !
I know thee now : and thee, sweet Brother.

Give me

Your hands : let us begone from this,—these
glooms

Disturb me. See! these old oaks, how they toss
Their arms up, in appeal from earth to heaven!
And hark! their groans!—and then the sighing
winds

Like the long wail of sorrow o'er a tomb!

CANUTE.

It is, in truth, a melancholy haunt.
We will depart.

GUNILDA.

No! now methinks 'tis wholesome
To commune here with melancholy thoughts.
The outer world is mad with reckless mirth,
And drunken Laughter reels 'mid gaping graves;
But Wisdom has her seat, with Sadness, here.
Yet, who shall brave despair? Oh, Sir! this
earth

Is sick with horrors!—the black midnight air
Hath hung its pall above *such* deeds! Blood,—
blood

Doth smear the cheek of morning, and the sun
Sinks on a bloody pillow. Men! I tell ye
Murder is grown familiar, carnage a game,
A daily, wholesale game, which ye all play at.
Why, 'tis the common pastime of these kings
To make wives widows, and poor mothers child-
less.

Ay, stamp on earth ; 'tis hollow : nought but
the shell
Of a vast, crumbling charnel.

SWEYN.

Would I were laid there !
Thy misery makes me wish to die with thee.

GUNILDA.

Father, why are you grieved?—*I do not grieve*
you,
Do I, sweet Father?—Talk you of dying with
me?
We'll make our graves together—come—our
task

Is one of toil, delay not ; we must have room
To pillow my fair infants on this bosom :
They'll sleep on nought less soft. [*She shrieks.*]

Where are they now?

If but the wind blew chill, then would they
shudder—

If you look'd gravely on them, they grew pale—
If touch'd too roughly on the cheek, they wept—
And now—now—Father ! Brother ! I beheld
them

Shrieking and clinging to their father's breast,
Kissing his white and gasping lips—his eyes
In their last dying spasm—that still saw

The butchery they shared with him. I saw them
Writhing beneath their daggers—ay, and *heard*
The stabbings—here—here in my brain! Poor
babes!

They cast them out, when dead, to the cold
moon,

And freezing night-winds—and I live. You
weep

And pity me that I *do* live. Sit down,
And I will tell you stories of my children.

SWEYN.

Here do I kneel beside thee, and invoke
Thy thunders and thy lightnings, and thy tem-
pests,

Upon their savage heads, God of my fathers!
Canute, my son, kneel down with me, and swear
Hate that ne'er sleeps, vengeance insatiable!

CANUTE.

May this right hand shrivel in timeless age,
If it forgets its vengeance! So may I thrive
Hereafter, as I satisfy this wrong!
Hear, Ethelred of England!—hear, false Edric!
On you and all your lineage I vow
The hate that knows not mercy!

[*During these speeches GUNILDA has knelt be-
side them.*]

GOTHMUND.

Silently

She ratifies the curse : the gloomy passion
Creeps, like the shadow of death, across her features.

How awful is this silent imprecation,
Whose import is but guess'd at in the glare
Of the dark, hollow, supernatural eye ;
In the dread smile that curls the livid lips ;
In the clench'd, quivering hands, and feeble
frame

With powerless anguish heaving.

SWEYN.

She grows paler.

Oh, lift her up, my Lords, and softly bear her
To present aid.

GOTHMUND.

That hope were vain : she is dying.
Crowd not around—give air.

LADY.

Nay, hold her hands.

This sudden flush and struggle will be her last.
Her limbs subside—her cheeks grow darkly
pale—

She breathes not—her heart's broken !

CANUTE (*stooping over the body*).

Thus, Gunilda,

I kiss thee for the last time—my poor sister!

Yet shalt thou be avenged—amply avenged!

Gothmund, do thou prepare fit obsequies,

And lay her with her children. Come, my

Father;

Lean on me—you are faint. Nay, steel your

heart

With thoughts of our full vengeance! So, you

revive.

Forward, my Lords; to death or victory!

And be our cry—"Revenge!—Gunilda's

wrongs!"

[*Exeunt.*

PART THE FIRST.

THE COURTIERS.

The Palace of London.

*Enter the Earls of NORTHUMBERLAND, BULLOIGN,
and CORNWALL; FRITHEGIST, MORCAR, and
SIGIFERTH.*

NORTHUMBERLAND.



BROTHER of Bulloign, 'tis a day of
sorrow
That frowns on your arrival.

BULLOIGN.

Thou speak'st truly,
Good brother Uthred : he has lost all spirit,
And seems, indeed, in great extremity.
How happen'd this? Such deep despondency
Is sanction'd by nought urgent?

NORTHUMBERLAND.

He has been ill
Of body, and much shaken in his mind

Since those sad, bloody vespers of Saint Brice.

BULLOIGN.

Ay, 'twas a sweeping massacre.

CORNWALL.

Methinks

The ghosts of all those pretty Danish babes
That, with their slaughter'd mothers, died that
night,

Are ever present at his bed and board.

And yet the deed was needful.

BULLOIGN.

Say not so :

The act was hellish ; mark the penalty.

NORTHUMBERLAND.

The act was needful, and I sanction'd it.
Eustace, there was a rank disease, that needed
To be let blood. Shake not your head : we are
not

Nice reasoners here on points of precedent,
But cut our way through with our Saxon swords.

Enter Prince EDWY : after him EDMUND.

BULLOIGN.

Edwy, how fares our father Ethelred ?

NORTHUMBERLAND.

Good Brother, speak.

[*EDWY walks past, moodily, and in silence.*

All salute EDMUND.

EDMUND.

My Lords, I give you thanks.

Yet, though you bow thus, like th' old Persian
sages,

In worship of the rising sun, believe me,

I much rejoice to be the messenger

Of comfortable news to loyal hearts.

My brother, here, doubtless hath told how far

His grace hath been revived.

EDWY.

Nay, Sir, not I:

Enough for me the king is like to live:

Such news will be its own good trumpeter.

NORTHUMBERLAND (*aside*).

Well art thou named, proud Edwy, King of

Churls!

EDMUND.

Dear brother of Northumberland, the king,

In this extremity of ill-timed sickness,

Yields for a space his sceptre to my hands;

(Weak though they be in youth, and lacking that

Which yet your sage experience shall supply;)

And, furthermore, to make assurance firm,

Hath join'd Lord Edric, Duke of Mercia,

In the commission. So shall our fiery haste
Be, by his politic caution, stayed and tempered.

NORTHUMBERLAND.

Oh, sorrowful conclusion to our hopes !
So ends a dream of promise.

SIGIFERTH.

Hath the king
Named Edric as joint regent with your grace ?
Why then 'tis time for honest men to fly ;
For us, at least, good Morcar ; we, though loyal,
Are hateful, being Danes.

EDMUND.

Nay, Sigiferth,
Your speech is more in haste than reason. Oh !
You have a fair wife ; fame speaks kindly of her.
You seek excuse for leisure, she being absent ;—
A daughter too ?

SIGIFERTH.

My liege, I have a wife
That is indeed a miracle ; but not
As being beautiful, though she *is* beautiful ;
Nor yet as wise, though she is full of wisdom ;
But for strong virtue and a pious heart.
How can we live, Sir, 'neath the savage hand,
Red with the gore of our slain countrymen ?
Edric being king, then tremble Danes !

EDMUND.

By heaven!

You give your tongue, my Lord, a dangerous
licence.

A fell deed hath been done, (how I abhor
The act ye know) and idle imputations
Have touch'd this Duke of Mercia. Sir, his
name

Must not be shot at with these random shafts.
He is my sister's husband, and most closely
Wrapp'd in the mantle of my father's favour.
Speak then advisedly.

BULLOIGN.

Brave brother Edmund—

Or, pardon me, my Prince!—as your new sta-
tion—

EDMUND.

Nay, Eustace, call me brother still. Affection
Regards not unsubstantial things, as titles.
All hearts that love are equal.

BULLOIGN.

Well, my Brother—

My noble-minded brother (I will call you so),
Trust not your generous heart too far. Duke
Edric

Though of our kindred, is not—I must say it—

The favourite of good fame. I am distrustful.

EDMUND.

'Tis hard to judge men's hearts; nor should we
judge

Too harshly. As for me, I'm somewhat young
T' have studied men's minds deeply. I look
round

Upon the superficial face of things,
And, like the swallow, skim the smoothest wave;
Or, moth-like, perch upon the brightest flower.
'Till now I deem'd all life was as a spring,
And turn'd my cheek to sunshine, like a plant.
I saw all nature beautiful, and deem'd
All creatures good. Now must I prune my spirit,
And bend my mind down to the tasks of age.
I must discard those graceful witcheries
That take the buoyant phantasy of youth,
Moulding to shapes its airy speculation,
And stamping truth on dreams. Away with
them!

The dark days of reality are come.
Welcome the storms of life! Welcome the strife
That flashes round the stations of the great,
Like lightnings o'er the mountain-tops! Why,
ay,—

I was not made to lie for ever listless

On the lap of joy. I'll strain my eaglet-wing
Against these tempests, and with dauntless eye
Look up unto this sun of Denmark. But,
My Lords, I cry you mercy for this sally :
Somewhat too harshly, I *do* think, opinion
Deals with the Duke of Mercia.

NORTHUMBERLAND.

Know you not Edric?

Alas, Sir, you will know him soon,—too soon !
Even thus he wound his thrall round Ethelred,
Who felt not 'twas a yoke firmer than steel.
I have seen him, in the midst of all our nobles,
A well-proved traitor; yet was he seated so,
Even in the heart's core of his cheated sovereign,
That, with some specious fawning, a fair show
Of zealous protestation, upturn'd eyes,
Hand on the heart, and bold appeals to Heaven,
He so rubb'd off the stain, that it but won him
The greater trust. None could withstand him,—
none.

Nor is't so strange; for we must all admit him
A man of a most admirable presence,
Subtle of wit, and eloquent of speech,
Puissant through station, noble in alliance,
Second to none for riches; and, with all,
Unbending in his selfishness; cool, crafty,

Scorner of truth, heartless, inexorable;—
In fine, a man without a conscience.

CORNWALL.

Truly,

Lord Uthred, you have laid your colours on
With an unsparing hand; and, I make bold
To say, a coarse one, and not just to nature.
I'm honour'd in his confidence, and assert
The king has not a liege-man truer of faith,
Juster of thought, more resolute in action,
Than him you trample down in absence thus.

[*During these speeches EDRIC has entered un-
observed.*

EDRIC (*stepping forward*).

My generous Lord of Cornwall, many thanks
For your protection of an absent friend.
My Lords! I knew not that I stood on trial.
Where are my jury?—who the judge? Prince
Edmund!

You here? Oh, then, I'm sure of justice! Pray
you,

Earl of Northumberland, proceed: you play
Th' accuser well: proceed. Few words I caught;
But they were eloquent, and took my fancy.
I thank you for this pleasantry; go on.
I feel a real debt that you should notice

My poor obscurity,—thus dragging forth
My blushing weakness to this brilliant circle.
Nay, Sir, you seem abash'd,—confused,—believe
it,
I ever lie uneasy under debt.

NORTHUMBERLAND.

Edric of Mercia, there are certain debts
You lack not skill in cancelling. Abash'd?
By you?—Sir, I conceive your irony:
Ay, Sir, and brave it!

EDMUND.

Brothers, no more of this.

Edric, you have been to blame. What thus by
stealth
You have heard, conceive unsaid: I will it so.
Dishonourable ways can never lead
To honourable issues. Uthred, I charge you
Follow this up no further.

NORTHUMBERLAND.

I, my Lord,

Am cased in stoutest armour, a free conscience.
I neither fear, nor am vindictive.

EDMUND.

Edric,

You answer not.

EDRIC.

Why, my young brother, you are
O' th' sudden grown most peremptory : nay,
You now but jest with me, your simple col-
league,
Raised by a breath, and whom a breath can level.
There was an open censure in your words,
There was a hidden sarcasm in your eye,
Which suit not our joint station : yet, I pass it,
Pass it, and smile, you see: 'twas but a banter—
The world, at least, should think so, and reflection
Will make that thought your own. I bow to you,
As a good liegeman to his future lord ;
But 'tis in private. Here we are as one,
Coequal in authority ; my age
Poising your youth—my hairs, with anxious
thought
Grey in their prime, giving a sober face
To the hot promise of your unshorn cheek :
So shall the purblind people be content.
Yours be the place of honour, mine of toil ;
Enough for Edric if young Edmund deem
His labours worth their best reward, his love.

EDMUND.

Edric, you speak unto an open heart
With openness and honest seeming. Take

My hand—and, Uthred, yours too. Now, my
Lords,
Be brothers once again.

EDRIC.

I tender mine,
In full forgiving amity. There is not
One whom I treasure up more faithfully
In my close heart.

EDMUND.

No more. Lord Sigiferth,
What say you of King Sweyn—comes he not
hither
Breathing defiance lion like?

NORTHUMBERLAND.

Why, so
He has done before; then meanly crept away,
Ashamed of his false spring.

SIGIFERTH.

A deadly rancour
Now fills him. On his way he met his daughter,
The wrong'd Gunilda, in her flight; who told
In some short words her piteous tale, then died.
On her cold body they have pledged an oath
Of vengeance.

EDRIC.

And these ravens will have prey;

So ends your logic, Lord—spoken like a Dane.
And now to council : but, remember all,
Wisdom is secret.

NORTHUMBERLAND.

Well—to council. Yet
Our argument, methinks, lies in its scabbard ;
And thus I would advance it !

[Half drawing his sword.]

EDRIC.

In that hand
Such argument is cogent. But, methinks,
A calculating head may here outweigh
The vigour of an arm. I say—to council !

[Exeunt.]

The Apartment of Edric.

EDRIC *alone.*

EDRIC.

Oh fool ! that knowing not thyself, know'st
nought !

What am I, that an idiot's jeer should shake
The equipoise that marks the master mind ?
I that have pass'd o'er faction's wildest sea
As a proud galley, tossing from my stem
The darkest tempest surge, as easily

As Pleasure's banner'd bark, from her smooth
side,
Scatters the light foam of a summer wave ;
Shall I, *I* swerve from my true course, to shun
This hollow frothy bubble of the North ?
Shame ! is't not ever thus the chafing eddies
Boil, fret, and bubble, in the wake of Greatness ?
I am not wont to meet those crosses :—ay
Unwelcome monitors ! ye speak to me
Of fleeting power, decaying fame, lost influence,
And all those nameless horrors that assail
A favourite in his fall : and therefore quails
My spirit 'neath Opinion's steadfast eye.
King Ethelred ! ere many days are pass'd,
Death will release thee from my nets ; so be it !
Cannot another web, as finely spun,
Suffice to snare another royal moth ?
And so—ha ! ha ! by heaven, I hate myself
For nursing the base thought—once more must I
Resume the flatterer's trade, and to the son
Kneel, fawn, lie, pander, worship, and betray
As erst, with toil mechanical, I truckled,
And won, and ruled the father ?—Cornwall !—
'tis well—
Now will I try thy mettle.

Enter CORNWALL.

CORNWALL.

My Lord, I trust the presence of a friend
May not be held intrusion.

EDRIC (*after a pause*).

Gentle Cornwall,
Excuse these wandering thoughts. Sorrow hath
thrown

A cloud across as firm a brow ere now.

CORNWALL.

Now, may they perish—

EDRIC.

Nay, my grief is not
That lying lips have licence in a court;
Or, that a fool, in presence of his peers,
Unchid, may spit his venom on the wise;
And yet, it is because such things may be,
When hearts and hands united most are needed,
I mourn for my devoted country. Ay,
The foe is now on horse that must be met—

CORNWALL.

By babbling greybeards, and a schoolboy king!

EDRIC (*keenly regarding him*).

Lord Ethelmar! what say you?—can a man
Who by his foe is stricken on the cheek,

Present the other to the blow—and smile—
And squeeze the hand that wrought the shame
on him?

CORNWALL.

Your father Abbot will cry ay,—and cite
Texts writ by hands that never held a sword.

EDRIC.

Shall a man dwell in fellowship with men
(Cornwall is none of such) who, when a friend
Is baited by a cur, lend him no aid,
But preach—'tis philosophic to endure?
Shall subjects owe allegiance, nor receive
Protection?

CORNWALL.

If, my Lord, I might, unchidden,
Unfold the secret map of troubled thought,
And body forth the picture of my heart
To the true friend that can aright peruse it,
Then would I surmise (but with deference,
Such as good men feel touching sacred things)
What med'cine best might reach those public
ills,
And heal our private wrongs.

EDRIC.

You hesitate;
Speak—and speak fearlessly.

CORNWALL.

I pause, my Lord,
Not doubting mine own honesty, not doubting
Th' expediency of that which my true heart,
Faithful in its allegiance to its friend,
(The best allegiance nature owns) makes mani-
fest;
But jealous, lest I touch not in your bosom
An answering chord. I pause—

EDRIC.

Speak, fearlessly.

CORNWALL (*kneeling*).

The evils which have wrung *Duke* Edric's heart
King Edric may redeem.

EDRIC.

My Lord!—how say you?

The skill is hazardous that probes men's minds.
Beware!—if you judge wrong, you do a wrong
That cautious wisdom should avenge; but if
Rightly you surmise—he that shuts such
dreams,
As you now give a body to, within
The shadowy caverns of the pregnant thought,
May not be thankful that rash hands should
drag
The pallid monsters from their den.

CORNWALL.

Forgive

This rash—

EDRIC (*hastily*).

Dear Ethelmar! the human soul
Is a more sensitive and plastic thing,
Apt to temptation, ductile in desire,
Than the monks picture when they people hell.
Art thou their fiend? thus, with a breath, to
give
A palpable shape to that which else had slept
The dim abortion of the imperfect mind.
Ye wild suggestions! desperate hopes!—Say,
where,
Where is that fatal fire within mine eye—
Where is that black corruption on my skin—
Where that o'erboiling of the feverish heart,
Rushing in venom to the parched lip,
That thus presumptuously thou tempt'st me,
tearing
Phantom Ambition from his cloudy home,
To clothe him in my mortal garb?—Oh, Sir,
How easy 'tis to wake this spectre—how
Impossible to lay the fiend to rest!
Ay, he will live, live as fiends live, on blood!
Not hecatombs may sate his wolfish maw!

CORNWALL.

My Lord!—my *liege*!—

EDRIC.

Ay, so it is—proceed—

Woo coy desire, with soft, seductive words;

Pamper imagination—and so steal

Warm on the fainting heart, and then—nay,

 speak not;

I will not add—betray. Cornwall, I'll trust
 thee:

Yet rashly hast thou ravish'd confidence.

On thy head be the sin.

CORNWALL.

On my head rest it!

And, as I prove myself thy bane or weal,

Welcome the weight, whether it come allied

With the keen axe, or sparkling coronet!

EDRIC.

Thy hand, *Duke* Ethelmar!—thy hand. It is,

Indeed, an easy thing to dream of crowns,

And brandish vision'd sceptres in the grasp—

But how to compass them?—

CORNWALL.

It may be done.

EDRIC.

By many roads men may accomplish greatness:

Some have stol'n bashful to the tardy throne ;
Some, with a nobler grasp, have rent the bauble
From the smooth brow of silken royalty,
Scorning to crush a form so impotent ;
Some, with glaived hand, have, in the front of
battle,
Shook their proud banner, dared the world in
arms,
And ruled with iron what they won with steel ;
Some have, with noiseless step, and vizar'd
features,
Cloak'd in th' accomplice gloom of ruffian night,
Crept to the couch of sleeping power, and sped
Th' unwary dreamer to the dreamless grave ;
Some—no, no,—none of these—I am not yet
So steep'd in the intoxicating cup,
That I must quaff, howe'er the draught be spiced.
Cornwall—why speak you not ?

CORNWALL.

I wait, my Lord,
To learn, not prompt, your will.

EDRIC.

Indeed ?

CORNWALL.

Nay, more—
Whate'er it be, to forward it as I may.

EDRIC.

'Tis well.

CORNWALL.

. You are wedded to the royal blood—

EDRIC.

Proceed.

CORNWALL.

The people know your rule.

EDRIC.

They ought:

It has been felt.

CORNWALL.

The king is dying.

EDRIC.

But

Bequeathing to the realm two prosperous
youths,

Heirs to his kingdom, and our love.

CORNWALL.

It may be

The people shall respect his legacy
In such sort as they note his living will;
And deem Duke Edric, or Queen Emma——

EDRIC.

Wherefore

Link you our names?

CORNWALL.

My Lord, if once again
I touch a string that vibrates, pardon me.
But many minds have mated you ere now :
Nay, lips there have been that have whisper'd
 treason
(When you were named together)'gainst the zeal
Wherewith her grace hath watch'd the nuptial
 lamp.—

EDRIC.

Forbear, my Lord of Cornwall ! If, as you say,
Thus boldly, that I love, such ribald trifling
With a loved name suits not the past : still less
Chimes with the future.

CORNWALL.

I offend no more.
I would have said, my Lord, and now will say,
There are, among our nobles, men who recognize
Queen Emma's beauty and Duke Edric's wis-
 dom,
And may be wrought upon to wish them mated.
The public weal's at stake : a foreign foe,
The Danish raven, that from far hath smelt
That carnage of Saint Brice—(Start not, my
 Lord,
The retrospect is needful) to our shores

Descends with prescient hunger : baser carrion
Hath lured this bird of prey unto our vitals—
Look at the state ! 'tis, as the king who rules it,
Upon the brink of a sure grave : in idiot
Apathy wrapp'd, or white with childish terror,
As each event succeeds : afraid to trust,
Yet impotent to act : without a leader,
(For shall a beardless boy degrade the title ?)
Unless (albeit with gentle violence)
The hand, so long our secret guide, shall boldly
Assume the vacant helm ; and rule of right
That which is his by merit.

EDRIC.

Merit ! Good Cornwall,
Yet is the scene thou sketchest a true picture ;
A fore-ground rough, beneath a turbid sky,
Opening in glory to a golden distance—
Yet, oh, how far remote !

CORNWALL.

Not to the bold.
Plume thy stout shoulders, even with dæmon
wings,
And thou shalt clear the barrier. Let us reflect.
The younger of the royal spawn, that churl,
As in their infinite contempt men style
Prince Edwy, may, like any worthless weed,

Be flung to any dunghill ; but his brother,
Edmund, hath qualities that royally
Endow a stripling form. Ay, though as wild
A gallant as e'er rifled female lips ;
Ardent as colt that never felt the bit ;
Tameless as greyhound first from collar slipp'd ;
Fierce as a falcon cast upon the wind ;
He has, withal, th' exterior attributes
That mark high birth, high spirit, and great
deeds.

The brow whereon throned Wisdom sits ; the
eyes
From whose twin orbs the glorious brethren
glance,
Valour and Mercy ; the sweet mouth whose smile
Wins, like the spirit of love, by unseen paths,
Upon the inmost heart.—

EDRIC.

'Sdeath ! what's to me
His beauties, or his virtues, or his vices ?
Why talk you thus ?

CORNWALL.

To stamp one grinding truth
Into your soul : to bear it down upon you,
With all th' emphatic force, weight, pain,—that
fear,

Relentless hate, and jealousy may heap,
Like coals of fire, upon your aching brain :—
For one inevitable evil clogs
Your path, that must——

EDRIC.

Good oracle, I will
Anticipate your fiat—must be removed.
But how, good time and Cornwall may suggest.

CORNWALL.

Trust me.

EDRIC.

I will. And now we separate.
Our conference may breed suspicion. Haply
Men's eyes are on us: be discreet—I feel,
Thus on the eve of greatness, more disturb'd
Than in my worst obscurity. Farewell—
Each to his labour; thou to sound the depths
Of popular opinion; I to weigh
Fate, and man's soul, and opportunity.

[*Exit* CORNWALL.]

EDRIC.

Cornwall! thou art mine own; bound by such
links

As shall compel thee to my will; whilst I
Stand free. 'Tis ever thus the master-genius
Subdues the meaner slaves of crime, and works

His hidden course with mole-like instruments.
Now Cornwall plumes his airy nothingness,
And makes the trusty wind his confidant,
How he has worm'd stern Edric's heart, and
 'stablish'd

Himself i' the post of most obsequious jackal
To the roused lion. Let him think so. Men
Who try these dangerous ventures, do well to
 give

The lead in guilt to knaves of forwarder sort:
So are they shielded from the worst, should worst
Befal: or, should a prosperous cast be thrown,
May sweep the stakes up with a smiling face,
Tossing to menial guilt the menial fee.
Such tools are zealous, deeming that they play
A swelling part, and bustle through the scene,
Giving in energy what lacks in grace.
Cornwall! take then thy station at mine ear,
And deem thyself a dæmon's minister:
A name shall not affright me from my purpose.
 [*Exit.*]

PART THE SECOND.

THE INTRIGUERS.

The Palace in London.

Enter EDMUND, NORTHUMBERLAND, BULLOIGN.

EDMUND.



A! ha!—Now, Bulloign, had I been
born a pagan,

As, in my conscience, I'm disposed to
think

Our father confessor hath bred me one,
I should convince you, by such precedents,
Drawn from authentic tales of ancient writ,
That, when I kneel to such a shape as hers
I have romanced away this hour in painting,
There is much reason in idolatry.
Why, Brother, she,—I say again—

BULLOIGN.

I grant you,
Without again retouching a fair picture,

That she is beautiful, and may be chaste.

EDMUND.

May ! why she *is* ; or I should hate her.

BULLOIGN.

So—

As you have tried, or will, I grant it : but, Sir,
Take heed : this wife, or daughter, of old Sigi-
ferth,—

(No matter which)—this miracle—this paragon—
May, like the caged bird, well be credited
For a most wanton wish to fly at large.
Nay, rob not the old pigeon of his mate.

EDMUND.

Bulloign ! you have not seen her. Wives will
have

An air that shows the matron, staid, majestic ;
Collected in their virtue, as becomes such
As, knowing what vice *may* be, can restrain it ;
A wide benignity of eye, that smiles
(Like mother Nature in her gentlest mood)
With the soft gaze of pleased maternity,
On all around that's good. But she I wot of
Has all the virgin's shyness, and her foot
A fawn-like elasticity, that suits not
Forms that have been the shrine of infant life.
She is the mountain-flower whom never eye

Hath mark'd but mine, and never hand shall
gather
From its sweet nest but mine. No more—Lord
Edric.
Leave us together.

NORTHUMBERLAND.

Why will you trust that man?

EDMUND.

Aha ! you've not forgot your fencing match
I' the council yester eve. Eustace, how think
you?
Play'd not the Duke of Mercia his foil well?
Methinks he touch'd my Lord Northumberland
Once and again : 'twas well the point was
hooded.

BULLOIGN.

Hush !

EDMUND.

Pshaw ! I care not.—[*To EDRIC, entering.*]—
Gentle potentate !
Cousin of Mercia ! most renown'd co-regent !
How fares your grace ? I have just pluck'd the
sleeve
Of memory, for these Lords, touching that feat
Of prowess, wherewith you surprised the court
Last night.

BULLOIGN.

Dear madcap coz, adieu ! We may not
The ear of needful business intercept.
Good day, my Lord of Mercia.

[*Exeunt BULLOIGN and NORTHUMBERLAND.*]

EDMUND.

Brother Edric,

There seem'd in that fastidious bow, and smile
So coldly doled, of supercilious meekness,
Feelings far alien from a brother's heart.
How's this ?—I would have concord.

EDRIC.

You shall command

Whate'er you will—my heart : but pardon me,
If somewhat yet of chill clings to my bearing.
The earliest ice will skin the scalded cup.
You summon'd me ?

EDMUND.

Ay, to as light a council

As ever prince call'd minister. I love.
You smile ; and think 'twere well to talk of war,
Canute, and those most waspish Danes. Ob-
serve me ;
I am prepared for all ; and, sans advice,
Have ta'en such steps as shall affright these
Danes.

But 'twas not that I sought to speak on—love,
Love is my theme to-day, and shall this night
Be my best business. You must aid me.

EDRIC.

I?

EDMUND.

Ay, sage viceregent! but seek not with whom.
Let me have masquers, minstrels, poets—all
Who best may give night serenades a zest.
Know you Lord Sigiferth—the Dane? You
start.

You know him.

EDRIC (*aside*).

Love another's wife?—a Dane's?
And seek her? This breeds mischief.—(*Aloud.*)

—Ay, my Lord,

The dotard who has married the young wife—

EDMUND.

Should be consulted?—should he not? Th'
emergency.

Presses—he is a Dane, and yet most trusty:
A noble of much weight, and wisely gifted.

EDRIC (*aside*).

Prince Edwy, too, lays his suit here. Even
brothers

May not, in love, be bloodless rivals.

EDMUND.

Fie!

Your apprehension's dull. 'Twere well, methinks,
To call this Lord to conference. He'll come
quickly,
Be flatter'd, and detain'd, 'till—

EDRIC.

'Till the jewel

He loves is filch'd from him?

EDMUND.

You know me not, Sir.

Govern your forward fancy more discreetly.

EDRIC.

My will is yours alone. When purpose you
To try th' adventure?

EDMUND.

When the moon first rises.

EDRIC.

That will be nine.

EDMUND.

No later. I must feed
My midnight lamp with studious oil, and forfeit
To th' public weal my rest; but, first, would
gladly
Strike from the flinty edge of care one spark
Of perishable joy.

EDRIC.

You are determined?

EDMUND.

Fully.

EDRIC.

My Lord, reflect—it is my duty.

EDMUND.

Nay,

Talk on; my purpose stands assured. Say,
therefore,

E'en what you will. Deal you in most sage
saws,

I shall most merrily interpret them.

EDRIC.

I know my duty, Prince—but love for you
Hoodwinks my judgment.

EDMUND.

Oh, no doubt, no doubt—

No more of that.

EDRIC.

Will you not name your lady?—

She is some flaring, summer-dighted dame,
Ambling through love's hot atmosphere, and
turning

Her throbbing bosom to young Cupid's beams,
As to yon sun the flower that bears his name.

I would I knew how deep this shaft hath sped ;
[*Aside.*
How keenly barb'd.

EDMUND.

Thou libeller of beauty !

EDRIC.

I know not that. What stature bears she?—say
What colour on her cheek?—fair as the morning?
Is that the tint? or beautiful as night;
Around whose umber'd brow the opal moon
Gathers a diamond diadem of stars?—
Where is your limner's skill?

EDMUND.

How should I paint her?

By what quaint alchemy could I distil
Tints of ærial delicacy, such
As Iris arches o'er a summer shower,
To sketch the evanescent charms that wander
About her beautiful presence !

EDRIC.

Thus, 'tis ever

With beauty—perfect, as love.

EDMUND.

Nay, 'tis not

The grace of her meek, bending, snowy neck ;
The delicate budding of her tender bosom,

Above a waist a stripling's hand might compass ;
The flowing outline of proportion'd limbs,
Moving with health's elastic lightness, blent
With all that nameless suavity of air
Which marks high birth ; 'tis not, alone, a face
Whose features are all symmetry ; an eye
In whose ethereal blue Love sits enshrined,
A spirit in a star ; cheeks eloquent
In changeful blushes, as her sweetest lips
In the harmonious utterance of pure thoughts :
'Tis not all these—the palpable ornaments
Of the material mould, love's pageantry
Floating o'er beauty's surface (as the galley
That, in its proud trim, bore the Egyptian queen
Along the rosy-tinted waves, reflecting
The blazon of that mock divinity):
No, no ! it is not these that win my heart :
But 'tis the pure intelligence of mind
That, like some inborn light, beams from her
soul ;
The virtuous thoughts, that clothe her as a gar-
ment ;
The chastity, the candour, and the meekness,
That, through her parted hair, look from a brow
And features, where the seal of heaven is set !
Oh, Edric ! 'tis, in truth, a countenance

Whereon a saint might look, loving yet passion-
less ;

A record of philosophy ; a page
Which Wisdom might peruse, and learn, as in
A leaf of holy writ.

EDRIC.

Draw breath, fair Brother !

This is, indeed, to be enamour'd—but,
True as the portrait may be, is it quite
In character ? What hope you from a—wife—
Suiting your rhapsody ?

EDMUND.

A wife !—by Heaven !

You all are in one plot to madden me.
I love the daughter not the wife.

EDRIC.

Cry mercy !

Heaven speed your wooing ! So, as yet, you
have not

Whisper'd what ladies love to hear ?

EDMUND.

I have

But gazed—and gazed : yet can I read the
heart

In the fair superscription of the face ;
And all I name I pledge myself she is.

EDRIC.

Whate'er you please ; I shall believe it all.
And you, here, aim—

EDMUND.

No matter what my aim is.

At nine—remember. Ho ! Lord Edric—
hearken—

Be in my chamber, ere to-morrow's sun :
We shall have need of counsel—trusty and wise.
Till then, farewell !

[*Exit* EDMUND.]

EDRIC.

I do begin to think there's virtue in
My new ambition ; Fate so leagues herself
Accomplice to my will. The brothers woo
One mistress—prosperously may they woo her !
It is a charitable wish, and likely
To yield contentment, 'till each knows his wrong.
What then?—Am I to blame, should accident,
Or overweening zeal, tear off the bandage
From either's eyes ; and if ('tis natural)
Evil should grow of this, and, from the heart,
Wherein 'tis 'gender'd, travel to the hand ?
Let me consider.—This course is too slow.
To-night this gallant visits his unknown,
(For such she seems to him) this Alghitha,

Late wedded to her guardian, Sigiferth ;
In some fantastic freak of age, men say,
Churlish to watch what it may not enjoy.
This maiden, too, hath caught the eye of Edwy ;
And he is savage in his appetite.
What if both choose one moment for one suit ?
What if both meet in rage—can I help that ?
What if one slay the other—is't my fault ?
At least 'twill be my gain whate'er befall.
Shall I not turn it in my thought?—I will.
In *that* there's risk to none. [Exit.

The open Country.

Enter CANUTE, GOTHMUND, TURKILL, ANLAFFE,
and Suite.

CANUTE.

Thus far my father's wishes are fulfill'd,
And our lance quivers in fair England's heart.
Earl Gothmund, bear these tidings to the king,
Whose age-worn frame, and sorrow-stricken soul,
Need such refreshment : you may say thus
farther,
That plots, now ripening, promise early fruit :
We gain alike by battle or by parley.

GOTHMUND.

I go, my Lord.

[Exit GOTHMUND.]

CANUTE.

Turkill, this enemy,
Marshall'd by youths, bear them right cautiously.

TURKILL.

Our spies report, the sons of Ethelred,
And the co-regent Duke of Mercia,
Still haunt the court, leaving to graver heads
The toils of war.

CANUTE

Methinks, Northumberland
Had shown more soldiership, had he maintained
Yon hill's bold brow some hours. Flank'd by
that river,
We durst not have affronted his main battle.

TURKILL.

Cornwall, who, as Duke Edric's creature, holds
High influence o'er their councils, writes to me,
That, by Prince Edmund's order, who allows
No second in command, they may not hazard
One doubtful field, till join'd by his new levies,
Which are immediate. Young as he is, me-
thinks
Your grace will find no worthless foe in Ed-
mund.

CANUTE.

Such is my trust. I have not given my youth
A scholarship of arms, to waste my prime
In tilting for a pastime ; or, in blunting
My sword on silken-coated chamber-gallants.
I would do something which, while it serves the
state,

May, for itself, be worth a memory :
Something of prowess in the shock of steel ;
Or the wise combinations of plann'd fields,
Where thought does more than weapon ; or win
repute

For skill in conduct of successful plots,
Where the pen saves the sword a world of blood.

TURKILL.

We soldiers, good my Lord, would rather wade,
Even to the knees, in blood, than toil a league
On a rough road to avoid it. Yet, I own,
Plots promise well ; perhaps at lighter risk.

CANUTE.

Cornwall is Mercia's friend. How well I hate
That man thou know'st full well : yet, in this
game

We play deep stakes, and must, though prompt,
be cautious.

If, by to-morrow's sunset, we can force

No 'vantage in the field, we then essay
A wilier game. What think you? Ethelred
May his last hour gladly absolve from care,
And leave th' adjustment of our difference
To the arbitrement of umpires: I
Would not reject, and he will name, Duke Edric.

TURKILL.

Why, 'tis a hopeful scheme : impediment
I can see none—save, in your vow of vengeance.

CANUTE.

That shall be kept ; but may be kept as surely
In future council as on this battle-field.

Yes—I will meet, with a sheath'd sword, this
Edric

Now ; 'tis my policy :—the instant welfare
Of kings and nations rests upon my conduct.
In private quarrel these shall not be perill'd.

TURKILL.

A surer time may come.

CANUTE.

A sure time shall come—
My oath is register'd. But, first, my arm
Must, from his throne, pluck down this bloody
Saxon,
Whose crown a Dane shall wear more gloriously.
Then, Edric, at thy heart !—but not i' th' dark,

I shall strike at thee in an open field—
Then give thy forfeit limbs to feed the crow.
Now, Nobles, for the present be it your care
To plume our squadrons for the morrow's sun,
As if we had no thought but to display
Our prowess 'neath his eye. Within my tent
Meanwhile will I, with slow and wary thought,
Address my mind to either chance.—Depart.
[*Exeunt severally.*]

The Garden of Sigiferth.

Enter EDMUND.

EDMUND.

This is the gate—softly—ay, there's her chamber.
The light looks from her casement on the moon,
With a red eye, as one who watches. See!
What passes o'er the window?—now 'tis gone—
And now (her own sweet shade, as 'twere a
spirit,
Gracing this lonely hour) 'tis come again.
How beautiful, to one who loves, is such
A night as this! breathless as he who stills
His heart to catch love's sigh, dearer than words.
No sound of life disturbs the air:—the moon

Sits in her cloudy temple; like a priestess,
White-stoled, and radiant with the inward light
Of wisdom, holy thoughts, most pure desires,
And dreams that hold her in community
With yon angelic choir, whose sounding spheres
Peal hymns of adoration, through the depths
Of the calm, boundless, and eternal heaven !
Most soothing are the thoughts great Nature
breathes

Into the human soul !—as if from heaven,
Upon the altar of the heart, direct,
A purer flame descended, there to light
Th' accepted sacrifice ! How blest art thou,
Love, in thy garb of purity ! how base
In all thy meretricious braveries !
Thou art the blossom of the heart, that heralds
A various fruitage : some, like dead-sea apples,
That break in bitter dust within the lips ;
Some, of a cloying sweetness, which leave after
A legacy of sickening qualms ; some pungent,
That stimulate the craving sense, then pall it ;
But some have such blest flavour, wholesome
substance,
That appetite, unsated, still returns ;
As love's requital makes us doubly love.
She moves again, between the light and win-
dow—

How gracefully her shadow bends! and now
Her arm is raised—haply, to loose her tresses,
And fling them forth, a fountain of bright ring-
lets,

As waters round a statue. Come, sweet music!
Carry love's soul into her ear, and witch her
Unto my suit. Hist, hist! ye laggart minstrels!
Where do ye linger? [*He steps aside.*]

Enter EDWY and OSMER.

EDWY.

Nay, nay! I might have any woman so.
I would not love her, knave, beyond a week.
Ha! see you there, whom Edric told me of?
My blood's on fire. [*Catching at his dagger.*]

OSMER.

Think of her husband, Prince.

EDWY.

A sly gift to the church may absolve much.
See! here he comes again! Hell blister him!
Bastard, wilt thou stand by me?

OSMER.

Prove me.

EDWY.

By hell!

The villain tempts me strangely.

Enter SIGIFERTH, cloaked. He knocks at the door.

SIGIFERTH.

Alghitha!

EDWY.

His fancy is already in her chamber—
Damn him!

[EDWY and OSMER assail SIGIFERTH.

EDWY.

Hot liver! take this to thy core!

SIGIFERTH.

Oh! I am slain.

ALGITHA (*rushing out in terror*).

Help! help!

EDWY.

Sweet mistress—pr'ythee!

Thou shalt have usage such as ladies love.

Nay, then, I'll stop your mouth with kisses.

Enter EDMUND from behind.

EDMUND.

Fiend!

Whoe'er thou art, defend thyself! Unhand

The lady! Look to thy life.

EDWY (*aside*).

My brother's voice!

Osmer, upon him !

[*They both fight with EDMUND. OSMER
flies.*

EDWY.

Coward !—Hold, Edmund, hold
I'm wounded to the death !

EDMUND.

What !—speak again.
Lights there !—what ho !—hold up thy head !—
who art thou ?
My brother !—say not that thou art my brother.

EDWY.

Leave me !—begone !

Enter EDRIC, and Attendants with torches.

EDRIC.

What means this broil ?
(*Aside*). By death !
The churl it is that's hurt.

EDMUND.

Turn down your torches :
Lift not night's pall from such a sight as this.
Edric, the dæmons have been loosed on earth,
And ta'en men's shapes, and wrought such
bloody pranks
As should draw down th'avenging lightnings. See

How to the bloody corse of Sigiferth
Yon weeping woman clings. There lies my
brother,
Smote in his crime by an unconscious hand,
A brother's hand—his blood is on my sword—
See here! and on my head, and in my heart.
Oh, Edwy!

EDWY.

Touch me not! avaunt! I am
Revived again! Lord Edric, take me hence.

EDMUND.

Brother! your hand.

EDWY (*to* EDRIC).

Your arm, Sir; lead me hence.

[*Exit* EDWY *with* EDRIC.]

EDMUND (*to* ALGITHA).

Lady, permit a friend, who loved your father,
Gently to draw you from this scene.

ALGITHA.

My father!

Oh, yes! he was a father to me. Sigiferth!
My husband! my poor husband!

EDMUND.

Sacred Heaven!

Lady, forgive, that I—Thou bleeding clay
Forgive, that even in thought I wrong'd thee.

Lady,

How may I serve thee?

ALGITHA.

Oh, had you known him, Sir,
And seen how fondly from my infancy
He cherish'd me ; and, when the world grew
strong

In wickedness around me, gave in his age
The ægis of an honour'd name and house
To shield my friendless, maiden helplessness.

EDMUND.

Oh, say no more—

ALGITHA.

And can I view him now,
Defaced by murder's ruthless hand, nor feel
My desolation, and his fate?—My husband !
Friend ! father ! pardon that I think of aught
Than this, thy breathless clay—oh misery !

EDMUND.

Pray you permit that, with a friendly force,
I draw you from this sorrow. Sirs, take up
These poor remains ; and to Saint Stephen's
bear them.

Mine be the charge that honourable rites
And holy masses grace his sepulture.
Lady, I shall but lead you to your home,
And so commit you to your handmaid's care.

[Exeunt severally.]

The Palace in London.

Enter EDMUND, EDRIC, BULLOIGN, &c.

EDMUND.

My Lord of Mercia, I insist you waive
This topic. Whilst in *my* hand lies deputed
The sceptre, I will grasp it as a sword.

EDRIC.

I do but urge your father's express will,
The weakness of the times—fair policy——

EDMUND.

Away with policy! and, for the times,
Our firmness and unshrinking will shall nerve
The puny muscles of misrule. I bow,
As doth become a son, with filial sorrow,
Before a father's weakness; but, as a prince,
A patriot, and a man, I dare to think
And act as may advantage our poor country
Albeit amenable to cavilling fools
Touching this charge of disobedience. Gentle-
men,
Who feel as Englishmen should feel, already
Have three most precious weeks vainly been
wasted

In this most aimless conference.

EDRIC.

Sir,—

EDMUND.

Speak not !

I'll have no more on't. Bulloign, to horse ! and
bear

My orders to Northumberland and Cornwall,
That by to-morrow's sun, on Ashdown field,
Our power stand militant. Before the dawn
My place be at their head.

BULLOIGN.

I haste, my Prince ;
And with a light heart shall essay the journey,
Bearing such worthy tidings.

[*Exit BULLOIGN attended.*]

EDMUND.

Edric, your hand !

I take it in pledge that with no angry thought
Do I reject your well-meant counsel. Further,
I here commit to your fraternal care
That dearest hope I hold on earth, the beautiful,
The virtuous, and, though widow'd, virgin

Algitha.

She knows that with no selfish aim I strive
To win her from past grief. She shall be mine—

Your eye falls from me.

EDRIC (*aside*).

Dolt ! I have conjured up
Nought but despair by my vain plots. The
death

Of Sigiferth hath help'd him to a wife—
Me to new crimes. Shall I proceed—or pause?

EDMUND.

Why muse you ?

EDRIC.

Thoughts, my Lord, are very worthless.
So, when the stress of battle comes, my station
Is with weak woman and a death-bed ! Take
My sword ; a distaff, or a crucifix,
Suit better my new dignity.

EDMUND.

I command not
Aught so unworthy of your character.
Your Mercian levies, and the tardier Angles,
(Who with strong bit and sharp spur must be
ruled,)
To your experience we commit. Though some-
what
Of loiterers on the skirts of our main battle,
They shall well back us in to-morrow's fight.
Take, then, this post, as one of honour : trust me,

A firm mind and a skilful never yet
Were more in need. We purpose to enact
That which may ask prompt succour. Are you
content?

EDRIC.

Of force I must be.

EDMUND.

Now, to thee, fair Alghitha,
I shall but whisper one short word—and then—
I must not dwell on this. Commend me, Edric,
Unto the queen; her love for me is scant:—
Tell her not less, whate'er betide, there lives not
A heart more firm in honourable faith
To her, and her fair children. [*Exit EDMUND.*]

EDRIC.

The scale of fate is in my hands again!
Hope breathes once more! Who waits?

Enter a Servant.

Send to my chamber
The Earl of Cornwall's messenger. My pact
Shall with the Dane be kept—though yet my
claim
Upon Northumbria tremble in suspense.
Should Edmund lose to-morrow's day?—Why,
then,

R

I clutch the key, by whose most cunning wards
Empire within these turrets is shut in.

To-morrow ! ay, that is the staff I lean on ;
Round whose charm'd stem, as o'er a wizard's
wand,

The serpent, Hope, coils up his glittering folds.
Adieu to Edmund, should that day be lost ;
And that he wins it not shall be my care.
Edwy !—thou art an ill weed in my path,
From whence some poisonous drug may be dis-
till'd.

Thou hast a venom rankling in thy veins
Which a false tongue hath breathed into thy
sense

Of that chance blow, dealt by a brother's hand.
I'll prompt him to some post of trust to morrow,
And with a hawk's-eye watch the flight of chance.
The king will soon be dead : brief be, thereafter,
Thy widow's weeds, fair Emma ! I know no
guardian

More worthy of thy royal brood than I.
Oh ! trust me in thy dove-cote, I shall be
As plausible a fox as ever wiled
Bold chanticleer from roost ; and, for a kite,
The mildest bird that ever stoop'd to feather.
So, welcome Power ; and guide me to a gem

Of a yet brighter and more royal water !
Now wend I to the queen. Unholy love !
Dæmon ambition ! in your fiercest flames
Kindle your torches ; and, upon my tongue,
And in her heart, pour all your subtlest fires,
To win a jealous woman to my will !

[*Exit.*

PART THE THIRD.

THE TRAITORS.

The Palace in London.

Queen EMMA and EDRIC.

EMMA.



RISE, my Lord, rise—nay, Edric.

EDRIC.

To the earth

My knees shall grow, unless those angel lips
Shall tell me that my daring suit is pardon'd.

EMMA.

Women are used to pardon such.

EDRIC.

And that

My love in that soft bosom breeds no hate—

EMMA.

We do not hate because we are loved.

EDRIC.

Say, further

(Thou queen, whose empire is the boundless
heart

Of universal man whose unbought homage
Clings aye to the triumphant shrine of beauty)
Should not love's service have reward? I seek
In your *eyes*, only, a reply—one look—
One only look—I ask no more—but such
As on her love the well-woo'd Helen cast
When Venus led her to his pillow—such
As stung boy Gyges, when the Asian queen
Clung to his heart, in vengeance that her lord
Had, in his doting vanity, unveil'd
To eyes profane all her mysterious beauties—
Beauties, that vainly the fond bath clung round
With its enamour'd waters, as she cower'd
Beneath its lucid veil, a snowy pearl,
Set in a sparkling zone of chrysolite—
Look thus!—look thus!

EMMA.

'Thou dangerous tempter! leave me.
I dare not look.

EDRIC.

I thank thee for that "dare not."
Thus let me plead——

EMMA.

Stand off, my Lord; the king

Yet breathes : my faith is his : respect his death-bed.

EDRIC.

But, when that obstacle no more shall bar us,
Wilt thou ?—No answer !

EMMA.

Feel how I tremble.

EDRIC.

Thus,
Upon thy hand, I seal a lover's thanks.

EMMA.

Another time. Let me withdraw : anon
We'll talk of this—

EDRIC.

And, by my hopes, in love!
Which do so far outweigh all worldly wishes,
That at thy feet, glorying, I lay them down,
(Without one pledge from thee, save hope, hope
only.)

Here I abjure all thoughts that chime not with
The concord of your thoughts, all interests
Save those with yours conjoined—so help me
Heaven !

EMMA.

The only gift I now may yield is hope.
With that I thank you : nay, nay, look not so,

Or you will frighten me again. Remember,
(If that, indeed, may be a prize worth noting)
He wins not Emma's hand who sets no crown
On her son's brow.

EDRIC.

These words have slain two princes !
Adieu ! my beautiful—oh ! might I add
A fonder name—my own ! [*Exit* EDRIC.

EMMA.

He's gone.—My beating heart !—I've dared too
much.

I do not know myself.—How hot my cheek is !
I may not trust myself again, alone,
With this most guilty, most persuasive Edric.—
Freely I breathe again.—What have I said ?
Enough—haply, too much :—no ; let him
hope—

For hope may be a virtue, or a vice—
A bane, or cordial, as we tend its growth :
Nor am I bound to play the monitor.
—I have not known—I must not trust—myself.
Shall I, then, pause ?—I will not ; for the stake
At which I throw is empire for my child.
This duke must be restrain'd ; yet, in such wise,
That, pledging him, I may not stand committed,
In heart, in act, in fame : so may I win

His services unscath'd, and meet, unblemish'd,
The proud eye of Canute.—Why dwells my mind
For ever on Canute? May it not be,
That a shrewd eye shall, at a glance, pierce
 through
The kindred thoughts of kindred policy;
And mutual interest weave a silent bond
Valid as love, attractive as desire?
Oh, I have dared too much this day. T' accom-
 plish
My aim, I must be cautious; nor expose
A human heart to superhuman trial. [*Exit.*]

The Field of Ashdown.

Enter EDMUND, BULLOIGN, and Officers, armed.

EDMUND.

The loitering sun is up at last; and all
The dew-bred vapours, that now shroud fair
 earth,
With their wreath'd masses, soon will under-
 arch
The azure cope of heaven. 'Tis well, methinks:
Our toil will be the lighter in the shade.
Bulloign! brave comrades all! are our stout
 ranks

Marshall'd as we concerted?

BULLOIGN.

All, my Lord.

EDMUND.

Right.—And we now may recapitulate

The scheme of this day's charge.

[He unfolds a scroll.]

Enter EDWY.

Ha!—brother Edwy?

It warms my heart to see thee. Why, this argues

A gallant soul, to leave thy bed of sickness

For the rough usage of the field.

EDWY.

I beg

A boon.

EDMUND.

It shall be granted.

EDWY.

I demand

To lead the vanguard of the field.

EDMUND.

Dear Brother,

It may not be: yet, 'tis not that I doubt

Thy courage, or thy skill. Northumberland

Already is possess'd of our designs,

Which time permits not I again develop.
—Yet now, methinks, I have a post will suit you.

[To BULLOIGN.

My Lord of Bulloign, for a little space
I must absolve your shoulders from a load,
This panting gallant shall take up.—Fair
Brother, [To EDWY.

Wilt thou, in this day's fight, command the
escort

That guards our person? Be assured 'twill prove
(We'll make it such) the post of danger.

EDWY.

Sir,

Albeit unworthy of my rank, I take it:
Here, I presume, my duty is—obedience.

BULLOIGN.

Then step aside with me, my Lord, one moment,
Till I instruct you in the dangerous duties
Of your most precious charge.

[BULLOIGN and EDWY walk apart.

Enter an Officer in haste.

EDMUND.

What means this breathless haste?—your news?

OFFICER.

My Lord,

The enemy's on horse, already pushing
His heavy march through the hedged valleys,
threatening
Our right battalion's flank.

EDMUND.

Treason!—my Lords!
The foe anticipates us. Ho! with speed,
Ride some one to my Lord of Cornwall; charge
him
Not to abate his vantage-ground one inch,
'Till we support him with fresh troops.

Enter MORCAR.

Good Morcar,
Thou'rt from the right;—what hast thou seen?
Is't true
The foe so stoutly dares us?

MORCAR.

Ay, my Lord!
By heaven, I think they sweep in their array
Like an arm'd tempest! I beheld their bands
Bristling the horizon of that ample plain,
With all their spear-shafts glittering in the sun,
Even as a gloomy thunder-cloud that hurtles
His arrowy shower athwart a summer sky,
Slanting before the golden setting sun.

EDMUND.

My blood's on fire ! To horse ! Morcar, with
speed

Betake thee to our left, and, if Northumberland
Be not return'd, direct who next commands
To wheel his force, as arrows from the bow,
And charge whate'er he meets. By Egbert's
heart !

We'll burst upon the traitors in their march.

[*Exit MORCAR.*]

Enter NORTHUMBERLAND.

EDMUND.

How now, Earl Uthred ?—why not at your post ?
What of my father—is his grace well ?

NORTHUMBERLAND (*kneeling*).

My liege !

First, as thy faithful subject, let me kneel,
And cry—Long live King Edmund !

EDMUND.

What, Sir ?—Alas !

My father ! my poor father ! Oh ! had he none
To close, with filial love, his dying eyes !
Named he his son, good Uthred ? sped he one
blessing

Towards him, not combating for life alone,

But for his country's fame and freedom ?

NORTHUMBERLAND.

Yes,

He loved you to the last, and call'd you oft
The prop of his decaying hours, the shield
Of our degraded country. Oh, my liege,
Before the breath quite left him, your sad father
Muster'd his dying thoughts, and, being revived
Some moments by kind cordials, faintly look'd
Round, and so piteously assail'd our hearts,
With sighs, and tears, and self-accusing words,
That we, who watch'd by him that fatal hour,
Could scarce contain ourselves for grief.

EDMUND.

Oh, Sir,

Repeat the precious words he utter'd. Why,
Why was I absent ?

NORTHUMBERLAND.

'Twas of poor England, chiefly,
He spoke ; the prize, the prey, of ev'ry foe ;
Rent by the earthquakes of domestic wars ;
Uprooted by false traitors ; by weak friends
Abandon'd, and himself the weakest. Then
He wept afresh, and chid himself. " I see
" That God," he cried, " hath turn'd from us :
our battle

" Is weaken'd by revolt ! our trusted friends
" Betray our counsel, or stand out for terms
" Of most dishonourable peace. For me, Sirs—
" Poor Ethelred, the Unready—here behold me,
" Only prepared, at last, to die—to die.
" Oh, days of England's mourning ! struck to
earth
" Alike by friends or foes—crush'd like the grain
" Betwixt two mighty millstones. Land of
sorrow !
" Your date is past—your great renown extinct—
" Your sceptre in the grasp of foreign hands—
" Your throat laid bare unto a foreign sword !"
He spoke but little after, and then swoon'd—
Reviv'd—then dozed—and waken'd once again,
To sink into the last deep sleep of death.

Enter an Officer.

OFFICER.

The Earl of Cornwall is in full retreat.

EDMUND.

Fly, Bulloign !—take the traitor's post, and
speed
His soul to hell ! Northumberland !—away !
And govern thee, as if all England's realm
Weigh'd on our brain, and press'd us to the death !

Osmer, speed thou unto the Duke of Mercia,
And charge him so to expedite his march
That, ere the sun hath reach'd the height of
heaven.

He stand on th' adverse bank of yon good ford,
Holding the desperate pass, as one who strains,
With clench'd teeth, bursting eyeballs, blanched
lips,

For mastery—for life !—Edwy, unsheath
Thy sword in thy first field ; and wield it so,
As if for vengeance, knowing it thy last !

[*Exeunt severally.*

Another part of the Field of Ashdown.

Alarums.

Enter CANUTE, ANLAFFE, attended.

ANLAFFE.

**Your grace, in this day's famous charge, hath so
 Acquitted your high valour, and sustain'd
 Your wonted captainship, that now your subjects
 Crave, as a boon, that you no more expose
 Your precious life to needless danger.**

CANUTE.

Ha!

Well charged, brave Turkill !—see, how Goth-
mund wheels
Upon their staggering flank !—Here will I rest
Awhile.—Why, ay, this Ashdown in our story
Shall have a brave remembrance. Gallant An-
laffe,
Well hast thou borne thee in this trial—kneel ;
And, though dark Mercia chafe, and gnaw the
bit,
Rise up, Earl of Northumberland ! Where are
they—
The spoils of the old Saxon lord ?

ANLAFFE.

Behold
His sword, (a broken one) and spurs, and belt.

CANUTE.

A braver knight, a worthier, or a wiser,
Sat not on horse, or sway'd in council.

ANLAFFE.

He
Comported him with death, as one who looks
With scorn on that which he despises : striving
To struggle on one knee, and feebly shaking
His weaponless hand in air, he shouted—" Ed-
mund !—
" England ! "—then fell prone, like an oak, and
died.

Enter an Officer.

CANUTE.

Thy message?—say?

OFFICER.

King Edmund still, though wounded,
Fights like a stag at bay. Cornwall hath 'scaped
And pledges that the Duke of Mercia stirs not
One soldier to the rescue.

CANUTE.

Bid him spur
Unto the duke, and say, that, having won
The ford, we strike at London. Unto him
I do commend (should he indeed survive)
The master, whom this bright day hath discrown'd.
What says brave Anlaffe?

ANLAFFE.

Oh, my Lord, to horse!
By Odin! England's banner is afloat
Once more, on yon hill's crest! No meaner arm
May stem King Edmund's charge!

CANUTE.

Upon them, then!
And be our cry—"St. Brice!"—"Gunilda's
wrongs!"

[Exeunt.]

Another part of the Field of Ashdown.

Enter EDRIC, attended: the Earl of CORNWALL.

CORNWALL.

With bended knee, I here salute your grace
As Mercia's king, Duke of Northumbria,
And guardian of fair England's realm.

EDRIC.

Indeed !

Is Edmund slain ?—how say'st thou ?—quick !

CORNWALL.

I know not ;

But do believe it well. Of this be sure ;
If breathing, he has not a subject now
Will cry, " God save him ! "—Edwy is fall'n.

EDRIC.

How died he ?

CORNWALL.

Charging with Turkill, in the foremost rank,
We singled out King Edmund, who still fought,
Back'd by some friends, around his household
 banner ;
Enacting deeds that well became his birth.
In gloomy mood, some score yards in the rear,

Prince Edwy rein'd his horse in, nor would move
One man to the rescue. I could see his face
Convulsed with varying passions, pale and
ghastly,

While his fierce troop, indignant, chafed around
him ;

Who, when they saw the royal banner stoop,
No longer might be stay'd, but onward sprang,
Too late, (so well their leader's treason wrought)
To snatch the doubtful wreath of victory,
But timely to preserve King Edmund's life.
The Churl charged with them—whether by
sense of shame

Stung, or remorse, instinct of courage, love
Of kindred, lingering still at heart, I know not ;
But, in the midst, struggling with Turkill,
wrenching,

With knit teeth, for the standard, I observed,
And, from behind, charging at gallop, smote
him—

EDRIC.

What, dead?—

CORNWALL (*displaying his sword*).

Behold ! heart's blood was never blacker !

EDRIC.

I—I—'tis well !

CORNWALL.

I had his head struck off,
And, in its warm blood reeking, on a pole,
Shouting, we bore it through the Saxon ranks,
And cried, "Behold your King!" sudden, de-
ceived
By the resemblance of the brothers, fear
Dispersed their bravest——But, behold!—whom
fate
Yields to your hand—the royal fugitive!

Enter EDMUND wounded and fatigued.

EDMUND.

All lost—all lost!—thou damned Mercia!
Here, consummate thy treason!—here, in my
heart! [Uncovering his bosom.
Oh England! my poor country!
Ha! Cornwall—traitor!—art *thou* there?
Thank Heaven,
I yet have strength!

[*He rushes at, and slightly wounds, CORN-*
WALL.

CORNWALL.

Have at thee, crownless king!

EDRIC (*interposing*).

Hold!—Thus I strike your sword down. Ethel-
mar,

Abate your fiery zeal. Put up, my Lord,
Your sword—must I repeat it? Edmund, I am
not

The bloodhound that thou deem'st me. Question
not

Why I am—what I am? There lies a path
Of safety, leading to the forest.

EDMUND.

Almost

I hate a life, due at thy hand.

[*A salute of trumpets.*]

EDRIC.

Canute

Comes on the instant: fly!

EDMUND (*as he goes out*).

Cornwall, remember!

Enter CANUTE, TURKILL, ANLAFFE, GOTHMUND,
attended.

CANUTE.

My Lord of Mercia, good day! and thanks.
You have perform'd fair service; for the which
We shall be grateful.

EDRIC.

Sir, it moves me much
That, with this manifest slight, you spurn and
trample

Our compact's true intent. You march to London?—

CANUTE.

Such is our will.

EDRIC.

Whilst I, this kingdom's regent,
Possess its keys—in arms?

CANUTE.

Even so. But come ;
We shall but waste our new-born love in jars,
Which only make the vulgar speculate.
We do not doubt we can expound some reasons
Upon our way, shall satisfy your grace.

[*Exeunt.*]

Court of the Palace in London.

Enter EDRIC *and* CORNWALL.

CORNWALL.

The Danes do lord it strangely here ! I pray
To be released from my most irksome charge
Of joint command. The meanest citizen
Cannot protect his house, his wife, his substance,
From Turkill and these ruffian officers,
Who laugh when, with remonstrance, I but
name

Your grace, or cite their king's commands.

EDRIC.

May all

Scorch in eternal flames! Why com'st to me?
As if *I* were the cause—and so from me
The remedy might spring. 'Thou sting'st me,
serpent!

CORNWALL.

This tone, my Lord!—to me—

EDRIC.

Nay, gentle Cornwall!
Mine own most trusty (and most trusted) friend,
Excuse these sallies. I am wrought upon,
Thou know'st I am, too hardly for my temper.
I would have rest—a little solitude—
And yet—no—stay, one moment. Presently
I shall be calm.

CORNWALL.

It was well done to spare
King Edmund's life. He may (if, as seems likely,
The Danes shall play us foul) be useful yet.
I worship thee for that good policy.

EDRIC.

What! wilt not give me credit for one deed
Of lingering pity?—ay, Sir, fortify
The arm and head by beggaring the heart.

Onward, still onward, must I rush !

CORNWALL.

Too deeply
You ponder on this matter. 'Tis not well
To predicate great evils from slight cause :
We shall but laugh hereafter at our fears.

EDRIC.

Your mind has not been task'd as mine has
been.

I have look'd down into the deep of time,
And sounded with true plummet its abysses ;
And, hov'ring o'er its summer smoothness, well
Can augur all its wintry wrath, and point
Where shoals lie hid, rocks threaten, whirlpools
menace ;

And trace past wrecks upon the horrid shores,
Or 'neath the gloomy billows mouldering.
Therefore it is that, with a boding eye,
I watch the stormy symptoms of the times.

CORNWALL.

You know not yet Canute.

EDRIC.

Know him? Too well ;—
And yet too little. It is hard to reach
Unto the height of his proud mind ; still harder
Its range and dark recesses to explore.

CORNWALL.

True foxes' dens ! strongholds of craft and
cruelty !

EDRIC.

He is a man most crafty, though most brave :
And, yet, being brave, not treach'rous, e'en to
foes,

Except so far as war's rough game permits—

CORNWALL

To cheat ye with permitted stratagems.

EDRIC.

True : he will sluice men's blood in lawful
quarrel

As if 'twere water in a worthless pitcher.

A mighty hunter, he will sweep on, on,

Cheering his toothed hounds upon the prey,

As though the chase of man were but a sport :

And, yet, in peace he will be mild as maids are,

And affable as any prosperous suitor ;

Though sworn to justice, leaning still to mercy ;

A keen inquisitor, yet most indulgent

Where doubtful acts need kind interpreters.

Withal—he will not compass his desires

By means that are not worthy of a king.

CORNWALL.

Ay, thus it is—

EDRIC.

Thus?—yet I know him not ;—
And no man knows him : and for this I hate
him !

So blended, and so opposite, his qualities :
I cannot please, know not if I offend,
Fear to oppose, and dare not tempt him. Come,
come—

I will endure these torturing doubts no longer—
This morning I will know my fate, and act
As best becomes the crisis. Emma, too,
Hath summon'd me to conference : too long
Deferr'd :—I like not that. Lord Ethelmar,
I will be satisfied !

CORNWALL.

You ought—you shall be !
[*Exeunt.*]

The Palace in London.

Enter CANUTE and EMMA.

CANUTE.

Fair Queen, I will not now profess to thee
That which would scarce become thy sober weeds,
And would comport ill with mine inward heart.

I will not deal with thee as flatterers do
With shallow girls, but speak as to a woman,
Whose eye dwells less upon the flowers of life
Than on its uses and realities.

I do not offer you a youthful heart,
(Though mine by age is such,) that, in its glee,
Sports like the roebuck with the wind, but one
Whose current has been chill'd by timeless
frosts.

If then thou may'st accept a soul, whose vigour
Is but a bent bow in the public hand ;
If thou'lt wed beauty, delicate as thine,
To a rough soldier's frame ; lowly I proffer
What a fastidious eye may pass unnoticed,
But a wise heart will prize.

EMMA.

With joyful omen

I take a pledge graced with sincerity ;
And with like plainness will reply to you.
I give you here a widow'd hand, but, with it,
No widow'd heart ; for mine hath never loved :
In you, Sir, I accept (and love from duty
Gently will spring) a father for my children,
And a protector of their mother's rights ;
Which thus, with perfect confidence, she yields
Into your firmer grasp.

CANUTE.

As I acquit
The trust, so prosper me kind Heaven !
[*They walk apart.*

Enter EDRIC.EDRIC (*aside*).

How's this?—

I dream—I dream !—’Sdeath, why am I disturb’d
At every idle chance? ’Tis natural
Man should bow down upon the hand of beauty,
And murmur well-conceiv’d adieus at parting.
He whispers—see! she smiles—betraying devil !
He puts his hot lip to her palm—fie, fie!

CANUTE (*on perceiving* EDRIC).

Mercia, Queen Emma hath deputed me—

EDRIC.

Dane !—from her own lips I must learn her will.
I thank thee—for thy—kind interposition !

[*Attempting to pass.*

CANUTE.

Hold back, my Lord !—How? you presume—
Retire !

Curb this intemperance.

EDRIC.

Proud heart, be still !

I should be—I—I *am* calm. Feel my hand.
'Tis cold, but trembles not. Nay, let me pass!
In very humbleness I would beseech you.
My heart is heavy with too many pangs—
Even certainty of wrong would bring relief.

CANUTE.

Sir, in pronouncing *no*, I mean you well:
Attend to me: 'twere wise.

EDRIC.

My Lord, I *must* pass.
My brain is somewhat wild—obstruct me not.
Queen Emma! hear!

CANUTE.

Not till you regulate
Your mien with more discretion.

EDRIC.

Ha! ha!—what,
The tyrant winces?

CANUTE.

Were I such, methinks
A daring front might be abased.

EDRIC.

Damnation!
Where, *what* am I, that hear and suffer this?—
Art thou a fiend commission'd to torment me?
Strike, with thy dagger! I could better bear it

Than these cool taunts, and that sarcastic eye,
Which sting me to my ruin. Speak ! resolve
me—

I can surmise, but would have certainty.
Emma ! I supplicate—I shall be brief,—
And, my Lord, temperate.

CANUTE.

To *me* your bearing
Is of slight import. Is your grace disposed

[*To* EMMA.

To the duke's prayer? Decision rests with you.

EMMA.

It is most painful ; but I yield : you sanction,
And I may not refuse.

EDRIC (*kneeling*).

My Queen !—my Emma !

EMMA (*to* CANUTE, *hastily*).

My Lord, perhaps this scene would pain me less,
Unwitness'd—yet be near me. Sir, I attend.

[*To* EDRIC.

EDRIC.

With a torn heart, and sorrow-choking tongue,
I kneel, I cling to thee, to ask my fate.
Yet, ere you shape an answer to my fears,
Pause—and look back. Recal the love I bore
you ;

Remember all the zeal wherewith I served you ;
Review the pledges that have pass'd between us,
The vows I paid, the hopes wherewith you
 bless'd me,

The smiles you lavish'd when I knelt and sued,
And all I staked my life, my soul, upon,
Which you, with blushing silence, ratified.
Oh, can you think on these things, and thus
 spurn me?

What! silent?—what—must all things be forgotten?

And will you thus consign me to despair?
Cruel, forsworn woman !

EMMA.

Not so, my Lord :
Here the deception has been *yours*, not mine.

EDRIC.

Mine the deception !—do I hear aright?

EMMA.

Your own o'ervaulting passions, and blind treasons,
Have been conspirators against yourself,
And fill'd your mind with idle dreams. Begone !

EDRIC.

How's this—am I awake? Art thou that Emma
Who parley'd once with Mercia's daring suit?

Am I that Mercia, who, for Emma's love,
Barter'd his peace—his faith? Oh, false as
beautiful!

EMMA.

Dare not to sully my fair fame with falsehoods,
Monstrous, and hateful to me, as—thyself!
Begone! thy suit is odious to my ears.
When Emma listens, 'tis to worthier lips.

EDRIC.

This, in my rival's presence! this, to me!
False one, thou stabb'st me with a double weapon.
Yet hear me once.

EMMA.

No, Duke of Mercia, no!
I have not sought this conference, which now
Has grown too painful. What I had to speak
His highness will declare. My Lord, farewell!
[*Exit.*]

EDRIC.

Now am I reckless of the world! Speak on—
[*To CANUTE.*]
Speak to your errand, King! since such, indeed,
Can lacquey for a woman.

CANUTE.

Duke of Mercia,
I shall be brief——

EDRIC (*interrupting*).

Oh ay ; I comprehend.

Brief ! When a suitor has a point to win,
With what a florid eloquence he swells
His periods ; how the liberal words flow forth !
How full of promise then ! but, the suit gain'd,
Heaven ! what a change ! And what a fool
were he,
Whose forward zeal had back'd him at his need,
To urge, " My succour here was prompt and
timely,
" My advocacy there avail'd you much ;
" While still your fortune hung upon the beam,
" My hand was ready, and my counsel free ;
" And now I ask the promised recompense—"
Reply, methinks, might be (as you now propose)
Brief.—Sir, proceed.

CANUTE (*aside*).

I pray for patience, Heaven !

The show, at least, of equanimity :
Rebellious heart, be calm !—(*Aloud*)—The
queen, in memory
Of your profess'd attachment, will not leave
To common fame the story of her fate.
As Mercia counsell'd once, she purposes
To knit her feebler fortunes to a hand

T

That may uphold them.

EDRIC.

Traitress!—Name the man.

CANUTE.

Oh, not the Duke of Mercia!

EDRIC.

Canute—I know thee
Subtle; and have believed thee wise.

CANUTE.

I hear

The text, and wait the exposition.

EDRIC.

I

Trifle no more. King! I demand my right:
Investiture of the Northumbrian lands
I claim'd.

CANUTE.

And I pledged not. They are the guerdon
Of a most stainless knight—Anlaffe of Jutland.

EDRIC.

Hear me! thou paltering fiend!—thou king!—
thou Dane!

(For, in that word, I would concentrate all
That hatred can conceive—scorn utter)—
dream'st thou

That I—that I—with power in my strong arm,

And intellect that will not bend to thine ;
That I, from thee, will tamely, unavenged,
Bear this light speech, these heavy, grinding
 wrongs ?

CANUTE.

Why ay ; such language well becomes such
 thoughts,
And suits the hardy, cool, gigantic villain,
Who, like some towering dæmon, stands before
 me.

I can endure that sinister, dark eye,
Shooting from 'neath the lowering brow askance
Its levell'd ray : that fierce, malignant smile
That curls the lip to an atrocious sneer,
As thou regard'st me o'er thy shoulder.

EDRIC.

Dar'st thou ?

CANUTE.

The mighty sea-snake so lifts up his neck
Amid the storm ; and scowls along the waters,
Frighting the hearts of wave-worn mariners.
But, serpent as thou art, thou know'st that I
Am master of the elements, and rule thee,
(Even as the wizard sways the fiends of hell)
Weighing thy strength and weakness, fashion-
 ing

To mine own ends thy passions and thy powers.
—Away!—

EDRIC.

I go: but, first, hell hear me curse
This Dane!—this meddling, lying, cozening
Dane!

—Ay,—thou shalt hear me, wert thou thrice as
great,

And I as helplessly within thy grasp.—
May she, for whom thou thus art false, prove
false

To thee—as (mark me well) I know she has
The aptitude: may she invade thy heart
With cankering jealousy—and may her offspring
Draw venom from her breast, and be to thee
As vipers, stinging thee with doubt—until
At length thy *hope* shall be they are not thine!

CANUTE.

I've borne this insolence too long.

EDRIC.

Ay, Prince!

Tap thy sword's hilt, as maidens try a lute:
'Twill fence thee in default of argument.

CANUTE.

Wretch! thus I stoop me to thy infamy.
Draw, villain!

EDRIC.

Joyfully—with all my soul!

[*After a pause.*I will not fight thee now. [*He sheaths his sword.*

CANUTE.

Defend thyself!

EDRIC.

What—*here*?—here, in thy very palace chamber?

You've a frank weapon, back'd thus with the odds.

What, if thou fall'st?—thy officers, methinks,
Might not be gentle judges of the fact.

The glory of tyrannicides is gone—

Brutus is honour'd less than Cæsar now.

CANUTE.

Begone! in safety: take twelve hours for
flight—Then, by the sacred household blood thou'st
shed!

I will have vengeance—deep, inexorable.

[*Exit CANUTE.*

EDRIC.

I go—but shall *return*!—

With what a look

Of measured scorn he leaves me!—Out upon 't!

I have borne this shame too far. Here do I
kneel,

Avenging Heaven! and supplicate—nay, nay,
I will not damn myself with prayers like these.
—Let me be calm—oh, fool! the veriest slave,
The common bully of the camp, may now
Strut by thee with swoln lip and lifted brows,
Blaming high heaven that moulded such a man.
—My brain is stunn'd: and yet—and yet, me-
thinks,

'Twas wise to meet, as I have met, the blow.

—Dæmon of craft! was't not thy policy
To goad me to perdition? But I am proof
'Gainst all. With half the kingdom in my
grasp,

Friends at my back, and space to combat on,
Why should my spirit quail?

Canute! the banner
Of inextinguishable hate is raised
Between us—woe to him who first cries

“Quarter!”

[*Exit.*

PART THE FOURTH.

THE FUGITIVES.

A Wood, apart from a Field of Battle.

Enter, as from the combat, EDRIC and CORNWALL.

CORNWALL.



NOW must we fly—

EDRIC.

Whither?—to heaven—or hell!

It matters not—all's over!—Cornwall, farewell!

It is the end—my book of life is shut.

CORNWALL.

My Lord, King Edmund yet makes head.

EDRIC.

If I

Had join'd my ranks to his, we might have
thriven.

What then?—Care I who rules? Canute, to my
ear,

Knells not with sound more hateful or disastrous

Than Edmund. Why what fool am I to parley
Thus with my fate! then let it come! a soldier's
Should be most welcome on a battle-field.

CORNWALL.

Though reckless of your own fate, think of those
Whose thread is knit with yours.

EDRIC.

What would you have?

CORNWALL.

We are enveloped by the double glooms
Of night and heavy fortune, yet may hope
T' elude the hunter's foot by speed or cunning.
We know, by late report, King Edmund rests,
Scarce fifty miles hence, in the mountain den
Of the dead fox, Northumberland: perhaps,
We, with some friends, may yet find refuge there.

EDRIC (*bitterly*).

Scant retinue, methinks!

CORNWALL.

Scant let it be—

We will not sum our strength by counting helms,
Or measure hope with fear's arithmetic.
The rock we found on is our tameless will.
A singleness of aim shall animate
One hardy sword to foil a troop of spears.
The very unity of our despair

Belts us in proof against an armament !
How strict soe'er the toils, trust me, like boars
We shall break through ; and scatter all would
 bar us,
As rotten brush-wood in a pathless wild.—
Courage !

EDRIC.

Ha ! think'st thou that I need thy clamour
To nerve a craven heart? I tell thee, Lord,
Thus on the slippery edge of fate, I fear not
Man in his craft or power, nor the wood idols
To which he kneels, nor death. I vibrate only
Between the fates that proffer ; weighing slowly
Which choice most shrewdly recommends itself.
Be silent. I would think. Well—to King Ed-
 mund

March we—so be't. Apprize such friends, as
 yet

Th' insatiate jaws of battle have not crush'd,
That we, ere twice the hopeful sun hath set,
Stoop our repentant banner at the foot
Of valiant Ironside. If once the beam
Of fortune, 'twixt these rivals, shall be balanced,
Once more the umpire weapon may command.

[*Exeunt.*

The open Country.

*Enter BULLOIGN, FRITHEGIST, MORCAR, and other
Officers of King Edmund.*

BULLOIGN.

Who, that remembers Ashdown, could have
hoped

To see an eve like this? Here we stand, Sirs,
Triumphant in the midst of our foe's wreck,
Like a proud navy, when the storm is hush'd,
Riding the surges 'mid their shatter'd prizes.

MORCAR.

The brave king will sleep well to-night.

FRITHEGIST.

Your pardon.

To-morrow being his bridal, he will have
A mind too busy even for dreams.

MORCAR.

How like

A tiger sprang he on Norwegian Harold,
Smote him to earth, and slew him at a blow!

FRITHEGIST.

Now will he claim a kiss for every blow
He gave or took in this same field to-day.

'Tis your true soldier's solace.

MORCAR.

Nay, for me

A brimming mead-cup, not a pouting lip,
Hath most refreshment after toils like ours.

FRITHEGIST.

He is a model for brave men. How nobly
He shapes himself to ev'ry hap of fortune!
With what a grace he wears a victory!
But a lost battle makes him terrible.

MORCAR.

Ay; when he 'scaped at Ashdown, never stag
Toss'd the bay'd dogs more gallantly in air.

FRITHEGIST.

Then with what skill his scatter'd troop he
rallied;

And, lavish of himself, stood faced to death,
When the hot foe our fainting squadrons charged.
And how devotedly our toils he shared!
Upon the sentinel's rude couch he slept—
(The mountain heather canopied with clouds)—
Fed on the soldier's coarse and scanty fare—
While cheerful words were ever on his tongue;
Blithe jests of fellowship for common men,
A martial descant for your stalwart captains;
And, for sage chieftains, such a range of mind

As holds strong victory in its grasp by right.

BULLOIGN.

Just, though enthusiastic, is your praise ;
And thus the roughest trooper's thought should
be.

But men are selfish, and the world ungrateful.
Why—there are murmurers here, because, for-
sooth,

The king's a man and loves a woman : yet
The hours he dedicates to her are all
Stol'n from his needful rest, and none from duty.
Enough of this. Now let us coolly scan
Our fortunes : for Duke Edric's overthrow
(Though his revolt was timely from Canute,
And gave the foe divided to our onset,
As this day's glorious vantage well has
proved)—

Edric's defeat, I say, will give the Dane
Space to collect his shatter'd force, and speed
Defiance to our teeth.

MORCAR.

Let him chafe on :
He never shall escape ; we now o'ermatch him.

BULLOIGN.

Doubtless we shall achieve what brave men can :
But he is brave too ; and, a wiser leader,

With firmer soldiers, in a stronger post,
Trust me, may not be found. True, he is lost
If *there* defeated; and, without a battle,
Retreat would be a desperate course: yet we
Must combat in Canute a man whose conduct
May not by common rules be circumscribed.

MORCAR.

All shall be well!

BULLOIGN.

Brethren in arms! our bearing
Should make that hope assurance. Let us gaze,
then,
Upon chance danger with an open eye—
And, circumspect as bold, act as befits
Approved good soldiers, on whose conduct rests
Their country's fate, when all is hazarded.

[*Exeunt.*]

The Gate of Northumberland's Castle.

Enter EDRIC, *disguised.*

EDRIC.

With more than mortal strength of heart and
limb,
Through fen and forest, since my late defeat,

Have I escaped the bloodhounds of my foe.
And now, ye towers of dead Northumberland!
I come a friendless wanderer to your gates,
To seek the hated footstool of a man
Whom, beyond pardon, I have wrong'd, and
 therefore
Hate not the less. What, should he greet me—
 thus?
“ Sir, as a brother, you have rent all ties
“ Of brotherly allegiance from your heart,
“ And pluck'd the root-stone from your house-
 hold wall;
“ Sir, as a subject, you have stoop'd to the dust
“ The glorious brow of an anointed king;
“ And made the sceptre as an osier twig,
“ That scares a schoolboy.” Ay, these dread re-
 proaches
Should he not utter, still his heart must feel them.
Yet must I now, with penitence in eye,
And crouching knees, and sorrow-bending neck,
Submit me to this hero's clemency,
Who knows that stern necessity, not love,
Compels me to his mercy. I have, indeed,
No other hope. Unconquerable Edmund!
Well, with thine iron limbs, and heart of fire,
Well hast thou stood a bulwark on the breach,

From which the shafts of war have glanced
like hail,
And Treason, foil'd of half his aim, retired.
So end my plots, and here I stand at last,
A wretch for every idiot lip to rail at—
A knave, o'ermatch'd and spurn'd—a woman's
fool!
Oh woman! what wert thou, that I should trust
thee?
And I—that woman should undo me thus?

Enter BULLOIGN.

BULLOIGN.

Whom have we here?

EDRIC.

A man of penitence!

BULLOIGN.

What! Edric Streon?—in these beggar
weeds!—

Ay, this is retribution!

EDRIC.

Good my Lord,
Where may I seek the king?—my weary knees
Yearn to bend down in lowly supplication.

BULLOIGN.

What would'st thou hope?

EDRIC.

From mercy much—and much
From a wise mind renouncing vengeance. Still
May I redeem (it shall be shown) my fault.
You pause—let me but see the king: I ask
No more.

BULLOIGN.

Nay, God forbid that I should deem
Pardon impossible—or penitence
An unavailing plea! It is a moment
Most prosperous for a suitor. Yester eve
Our royal warrior stoop'd his neck to fetters,
Light as e'er Hymen laid on lover's limbs.

EDRIC.

Now Heaven be praised!

BULLOIGN.

He is in happy humour;
And well may be.—Fair Algitha! I saw her,
All radiant from the nuptial couch, and cover'd
With all her spousal blushes, as a veil;
Modestly shrinking from admiring eyes:
Even as the glowing harvest moon, when, stealing
Her earliest glances through the eastern grove,
She wins all hearts with beauty.

EDRIC.

Well you speak

Her praises, and have pictured forth a bride
Such as beseems a youthful conqueror.

BULLOIGN.

I speak the truth.

EDRIC.

Sir ! these are precious moments ;
Pray you excuse that, with most eager haste,
I would improve them.

BULLOIGN.

Soft. Wait here—'twere well
That I precede you. He is now within,
And, with his gentle lady, culls the flowers,
The fairest and the best this life can yield.—
I shall but step into yon garden, where
They range another paradise. Believe me,
It would not be the office of a friend
T' intrude you an unwelcome visitant,
Upon his cherish'd hour, too suddenly.

[*Exeunt.*]

The Castle Garden.

EDMUND and ALGITHA.

ALGITHA.

Nay, now, dear love ! I may not list to thee :

My cheek—you shall not see it—burns with
blushes.

Suffice it, that I love thee—oh, how well !
And, with this hand, have giv'n thee tend'rest
proof.

EDMUND.

Speak !—let me hear that voice of melody !
In its sweet music, like the summer air,
Chiding, with almost inarticulate breath,
The saucy flowers, that will not cease to load
Her wings with incense, till, o'ercome and faint,
She flutters o'er the perfumed flattery,
And dies amid a wilderness of sweets.
Speak on.

ALGITHA.

I will not : yet methinks, I will ;
To prove to thee how inharmoniously
The voice of love may jar on love. Was't not
Upon the dreaming breast of Silence first
The cherub Love was hush'd in infancy ?

EDMUND.

I must be silent now : I can but gaze,
Till my sight dims with rapture.

ALGITHA.

Tell me not
In *words* that I am loved ; call me not fair ;

Oh, sully not the mirror, purity,
With Flattery's warm breath. Believe it, love,
The lips are ever false interpreters,
And feebly speak the language of the heart.
But, would'st thou descant on the sweetest
theme

That e'er shed roses on the cheek of youth,
Then be thine eloquence not of the tongue,
But couch thine argument within the eye:
There let the spirit of love stand radiant—
A seraph steep'd in light.

EDMUND.

Oh, how I love thee!

ALGITHA.

Nay, now that you look thus, it doth repent me
That I so lightly talk'd of this eye-language.
Oh, then I must fly from thee—

EDMUND.

Thus I detain thee—

And thus—(nay, on thy hand then) fix love's
seal,

That shall avail to fetter thee. My beautiful,
My delicate, pure-thoughted Algitha!
Within this paradise of flowers thou dwellest
As one whose spirit owns a kindred being
With all those subtle perfumes that exhale

From Nature's loneliest treasury of sweets.

ALGITHA.

Nay, this is flattery—all flattery.

EDMUND.

Say, then,

How shall I woo thee?—how acquit my love?
Give me that hand, so soft, so small, so fair,
So rounded in its tinted palm, so taper'd
In every rose-tipp'd finger. Let me kiss
The azure tracery, thus interlaced
Upon its ivory surface. Now you smile.

ALGITHA.

In quiet joy. What would you with my hand?

EDMUND.

Thou delicate, fair palm!
Let me peruse thy mystic characters.
Why, what a maze is here of vagrant lines,
Sketch'd lightly o'er the silken skin, as on
A fossil rock the impress of a leaf.
Behold the mystic characters! My love!
I'm grown a very seer in palmistry,
And read a smiling fortune in this hand.
Does not my skill claim some reward?—a
kiss?—

ALGITHA.

Fond fool, begone!

EDMUND.

Well, I am gone—

ALGITHA.

No, stay.

EDMUND.

Oh, then, I must be bribed.

ALGITHA.

Thou venal wretch!

What would'st thou have?

EDMUND.

A kiss—a smile—a sigh—

A pressure of the hand—a look of love.

Nay, there is not an accent of that tongue,

A motion of those lips, a transient glance

Of those soft eyes, but win upon my heart

With some new witchery. 'Tis very strange,

But, when I see thee, hear thee, think but on thee,

Stern manhood softens to a woman's mood,

And I become the very slave of tears.

ALGITHA.

The tears of joy are sweeter than her smiles.

EDMUND.

Bountiful Heaven! with benignant hand,

How thou dost temper all our woes with mercy

Till the good triumphs o'er our evil days!

My Algitha, in mystery I found thee,

In levity pursued, in madness loved thee !
'Mid thronging perils with true service woo'd
thee,

And, in the height of all my wrongs and sorrows,
When all but life seem'd lost, by pity won thee.

ALGITHA.

A happy captive, cherishing her chains.

EDMUND.

And now, in these wild times, thou look'st upon
me

As a warm sun-beam, breaking through the
clouds,

In freshen'd glory lighting up a landscape,
Seen by tired traveller from some shelter'd seat.
Oh, sweet is hope in youth's untroubled dawn,
And pleasant memory to the night of age !
But when a truant joy beams through the gloom
Of days like ours, it is philosophy
To snatch the noontide hours of happiness,
And crowd an age into one precious span.

ALGITHA.

Nay, my philosophy is better worth.
The present has to me a keener zest
From its connection with the past and future.
Since I've known thee, my dearest bliss is hope.
Trust me, the summer of our life shall wear

A less tempestuous aspect than its spring ;
And, in our autumn, such sweet thoughts shall
 cheer us,
As shall make smooth our wintry path to Heaven.

Life may have now a keener relish ; but,
As years creep on, the heart grows tenderer,
And tranquil thoughts steal gradually round us,
As the young ivy to the age-gnarl'd trunk
More firmly clings, than to the smoothest sapling.
Thus men seem knit to home, in middle age,
By fonder ties than in their prime of days ;
And thus it is that, in the eve of life,
The grandsire is the playmate of the child.

*Enter a groupe of Masquers, Dancers, Musicians,
 &c. with a Poet. They pass in procession.*

EDMUND.

How now !—what mean these mummers ?

POET.

We come, my Lord, to greet your grace and
 bride

With quaint shows and devices.

EDMUND.

What are you, Sir ?

Lord of Misrule, I take it; and these masquers
The subjects of so grave a potentate.

POET.

I am, if so it please your grace, a poet ;
And here you see the poor machinery
By which I eke out my conceits, as 'twere
A palpable imagery. May I proceed
T' unfold to this fair lady our device ?

EDMUND.

What says my Algitha ?

ALGITHA.

Most willingly.

The show will be a brave one.

POET.

I would explain.

These dancers, in their figured maze, will shadow
(Unworthy though they be) some mysteries.

EDMUND.

Nay, Sir, we shall be well content to admire
The text uncommented.

POET.

Minstrels, strike up !

And touch your instruments with skill divinest.
When, having solaced with harmonious sound
The royal ear, incontinent will I
Recite some well-concerted compliments,

Learn'd descants, and poetic rhapsodies,
Which, I presume to hope, somewhat may
please.

*A Masque, emblematical of Bridal Ceremonies, with
Music and Dancing, &c.; in the course of which
is introduced the following.*

HYMENEAL SONG.

Awake ! awake ! the hour approaches
When, with silent, sweet reproaches,
At each light delay, thy bride
With coy, downcast looks shall chide,
And refuse thy trembling kiss
Its custom'd, momentary, bliss.
Wake ! in kindling heaven afar
Softly winks the matin star,
Phospor, from the shades of night
Stepping o'er his path of light,
Ere his sire, the Sun, hath bounded
From fond Thetis' couch ; surrounded
With triumphant Tritons, blowing
Wreathed conchs ; and Nereids showing
White and graceful forms, reposing
On the clear waves, and disclosing,
By their mien, and sidelong eyes,
Sympathy with human ties.

Rise! the younger Hours have sprung
Through the bright gates, open flung,
On th' horizon's glowing rim ;
And the fresh Sol gathers him,
With a gladiator's spring,
To o'erleap this earthly ring.
Rise! thy young bride now is waking
From her dream of thee, and breaking,
With commingling smiles and tears,
From a trance of hopes and fears ;
For her thoughts were full of thee ;
And her thoughts were ecstasy.

Now, her modest couch beside,
Cowering she sits, in blushing pride ;
And lets down her flowing tresses
O'er a bosom that confesses,
In its rapid fall and swell,
That she loves thee—oh, how well !
Now her smiling handmaids bring
Every snowy-tinted thing
That for bridal trim seems meet :
Silken slippers for soft feet ;
Modest kerchief for a breast
Where a rude eye dares not rest ;
Broider'd robe, that clings to her
O'er a slender stomacher ;

With a light, transparent veil
That for shame shall scarce avail,
Knit by wreaths to her bow'd head—
Roses and wheat-ears garlanded.
Up! and haste thee to her arms,
Trembling with no feign'd alarms!

Now, the bright Divinity,
Stooping to the western sea,
With a lover's blushful haste,
Who the sweet hours may not waste,
Ere he plunges in the tide,
Casts one smiling glance aside
To his sister moon, that high
From the lucid, azure sky,
With half-averted features, pale,
(Like a face behind a veil)
Looks to earth; while star by star
Light their diamond sparks afar:
And the cheek of evening flushes,
In its last empurpling blushes,
With a tint, suffusing all,
Like a sleeping Bacchanal.

Haste! the nuptial rites prepare!
Now the jovial midnight air

Speed with music round the couch
Where the laughing bride-maids crouch,
As they lay a tearful head
On the dedicated bed ;
And, with decent care, exclude
The faint taper's glances rude,
That might tell her coming boy
All her fears and all her joy.

Now the nuptial rites are over,
And each home-returning lover,
With his fair beside him, mute,
Whispers his propitious suit,
And resolves, with brief delay,
To be happy while they may !

EDMUND.

Poet, thou hast acquitted thee full well,
And shalt receive the poet's laurel meed,
Placed on thy brow by hands most beautiful.
Thou shalt have gold too ; get thee gone—no
thanks. *[Exit Poet, &c.]*

Enter BULLOIGN.

Ha ! Eustace ! Thou art welcome—even here.

BULLOIGN.

I come, Sir, on the part o' the sinfullest man
(Haply most penitent) that ever craved
The boon of mercy from offended majesty—
Edric of Mercia.

EDMUND.

Why would'st thou speak a name
So odious to my soul: and here—and now?

BULLOIGN.

My liege, it is the bane of sovereignty
That leisure is a word whose gentle sound
May not survive within its stormy sphere.

EDMUND.

Truly thou speak'st. A king's ear should be
open
To the faint sighing of his meanest subject
As to the courtly influence of the great.
Nor let us harshly judge an irksome task:
For duty done contains its own reward,
As the red iron sears and heals together.
Speak then—of Edric Streon.

BULLOIGN.

He is a man
Most hateful to my heart; yet now so lost
In fortune, so abased in spirit, wretched,
Not simply in his sense of guilt, but guilt

O'ermatch'd and beggar'd by its own inventions,
That I could almost trust his abject grief—

EDMUND.

To be again betray'd !

ALGITHA.

Nay, love, to me
It seems that in the human heart there dwells
A spirit of conscience, that from second guilt
Avails to shield repentant vice.

EDMUND.

Such should be—
And policy might come in aid of virtue,
Teaching how well prosperity on earth
May be combined with Heaven. Grieved I
look

On a lost creature, finely gifted, such
As this most wretched man ; who once appear'd
Of better clay than common mortal men.
I loved him—I have trusted him—and he
Hath paid me with ingratitude, hate, treason.
These could I pardon ; but—

ALGITHA.

Dearest, remember,
He now is but the crime-gall'd, helpless slave—
Cast on thy mercy, voluntarily cast—
Without one hope but pity : and, save penitence,

(That may indeed subdue) all weaponless.

EDMUND.

He's arm'd with an inexorable heart—
In which no spring of human kindness waits
The holy stroke, even of a Moses' wand.
I trusted all to him !

ALGITHA.

I do adjure thee,
Spare his repentance—spare him in his crimes—
Leave him to conscience, and forgiving Heaven !

EDMUND.

Angel of pity ! thou hast pleaded well—
I trust for all—he lives.

ALGITHA.

Ah, this is glory !
Thus round a hero's neck I wind my arms
With a far nobler joy than as a bride.

EDMUND.

My love ! my life ! God be my witness ! not
For private, but for public wrong, I pause.
Were I but man, and not a prince (alas !
For royalty, that these are not as one !)
I could fling out my arms and take him back
Even with a dagger in his belt : but now
I must assert my kingdom's weal. He lives !
But, as a stranger to his household hearth.

I will not banish him this soil of England,
(For that were worse than death indeed,) but he
Must dwell as aliens do in foreign lands.

BULLOIGN.

He charged me urge how he may yet redeem
His guilt by precious service.

EDMUND.

I despise,
And would reject, his aid ; though it could seat
me
Upon a Cæsar's throne. Come, Algitha,
We will discourse; as we proceed, how best
The tenor of our will may be enforced.

[*Exeunt.*

PART THE FIFTH.

THE SINGLE COMBAT.

A Grove, in Front of Edmund's Camp.

Enter EDRIC in agitation, CORNWALL following him.

CORNWALL.



My Lord !—

Why walk you thus aside, so moodily?

My Lord !—Lord Edric !—be not thus
disturb'd.

EDRIC.

If thou wert as a captive at the bar,
Watching his judge's lip, that shall pronounce
The instant doom, and that a doubtful one :
If thou wert as a felon at the tree,
Who, in the dead pause of the silent crowd,
Has yet some hope to hear a voice cry—" Par-
don : "

If thou wert as the drowning, dying wretch,
Who, at his last gasp, sees a coming aid—
How would'st thou feel—how act?

Enter BULLOIGN.

Bulloign !—my fate !

BULLOIGN.

I have the king's commands, in few brief words,
To say to Edric Streon,—that his crime,
As it affects the person of the king,
Hath been forgiven ; but that, inasmuch
As, in its consequence, it hath committed
The kingdom's weal, it may not be forgotten.
You may assure yourself of life—nay, more,
Freedom from forced restraint.—But you must
live

Even as a stranger to your house, and dwell
An alien in your native land.—You speak not.

CORNWALL.

Sir, pray you notice not this mood : despair
Preys on his very heart.

[BULLOIGN *bows assent, and retires.*

CORNWALL.

Will you not speak?

EDRIC (*after a pause*).

The deep sea-wave has pass'd o'er me :—I breathe
Again !

CORNWALL.

My Lord, what think you on ? What would you ?

EDRIC.

Vengeance !

CORNWALL.

Does vengeance need long pondering ?

EDRIC.

There falters at my heart a something still
I struggle with, I wrestle with in vain.
Nay—thus I rend ye forth, and scatter ye
Unto the elements ! Away !—Farewell !
Thou gentler spirit, that still lingering clung'st,
As a good angel, to my heart !—farewell !
All sad, remorseful thoughts ! instinct of con-
science,
And sacred love of human-kind—farewell !
But welcome, ye black ministers of evil,
With all your tossing torches ! and, throughout
The pitchy darkness of my soul, fling all
Your fellest flames !

CORNWALL.

Be prudent—we are observed.

*Enter a group of Officers : EDRIC regards
them fiercely.*

EDRIC.

Why, let them come—they never shall behold

A man more wretched, and so desperate !

CORNWALL.

Retire, I pray, a moment. There seems, here,
Something a watchful spirit may improve.

[EDRIC *and* CORNWALL *walk apart.*

FIRST OFFICER.

In truth I'm sick of this: these mountain
marches,

In quest of what still, as the fire o' the fen,
Eludes our grasp, wear out my patience.

SECOND OFFICER.

Wherefore
Should the king still refuse the proffer'd truce?
Canute, methinks, from yon entrenchment looks
Like one who needs small aid from aught but
weapon.

THIRD OFFICER.

Tush ! the king judges (rightly, I think) that these
Circumvallating lines, and tangled passes,
But breed distrust of their own power and prowess
In the adverse ranks, which thus with punier
courage
Shall bide our onset, and more surely perish,
Caught in this labyrinth of rocks and woods,
Rivers and fens.

FIRST OFFICER.

And what care we?—Will England

Be happier for our deaths?—for sooner, trust me,
Than the Dane be dislodged, we perish. Pah!
It sours my blood, pondering on these our toils,
Dangers, and abstinence, to think that *he*,
Who, like the war-horse, should brave all, but
squanders

'The precious moments, like a lusty palfrey
Ambling beneath a woman's silken rein.
I'll fight no more.

EDRIC (*who has approached during this speech*).

And wherefore have ye fought?—
For honour—fame? Oh, these, indeed, are titles
That proud war doth affect; but, last they, friends?
A glorious harvest?—true: but who the reaper?
Your common men may toil, and bleed, and die,
Bondsmen of fame—artificers of honour,
Planting the bay they wear not; garlanding
A master's brow. What is the mark ye aim at?
He that affects a diadem, should brave
The hazard of his daring; nor depute
His vengeance to an hireling; nor transfer
To borrow'd hands the peril of the deed:
Th' ambition is his own—and such should be
The triumph, or the penance. This is my counsel,
(Simple, direct, and honest, as befits
Plain-spoken soldiers)—I would have these kings,

With their own swords, close their peculiar
quarrel,

And fight for mastership : so shall we save
Much innocent blood, and many doubtful days :
Or, let them take this kingdom, this poor soil,
This home of sorrow, this degraded England,
And e'en divide it. It has own'd seven masters,
And may suffice for two.

THIRD OFFICER.

By Heaven ! my Lord,
It is a thought the king, most joyfully,
Will give his heart to.

FIRST OFFICER.

Ay, it takes my fancy.

SECOND OFFICER.

And mine.

FIRST OFFICER.

Then haste we to the camp, and urge
The general voice to back our suit.

THIRD OFFICER.

The king
Hath sought this course before, and now will leap
T' anticipate our prayer. Brave comrades, forward !
[*Exeunt.*]

EDRIC.

Edmund !—my star looks brightly from its cloud,

While thine is on the wane. Soon shall thy fate,
Now soaring as an eagle, stoop to earth,
Like a kite struggling in a serpent's folds.
There may be darker spirit's in their camp
Than these: 'twere well we probed this malady.
Cornwall—steal thou unto their camp to-night,
And touch the plague spot with a fearless hand.
Go—in thy wildest caution mantled: dive
Deep down into the soldiers' hearts—and
prompt—
Nay, this must be well weigh'd. My Cornwall
—come,

Blest with a friend like thee, can I despair?

[*Exeunt.*

The Danish Camp.

Enter CANUTE, TURKILL, GOTHMUND, *and Officers.*

CANUTE.

Roll'd in her shadows, the wan spirit of night
Descends:—so frowningly our fortunes lour;
And angry nature heralds in a day
Of danger, it may be of doom, to us.

GOTHMUND.

The road is open to retreat.

.CANUTE.

Not so.

From a fair field the brave have no retreat.
I have compared the chances, and here plant
My standard—on this rock.

Enter BULLOIGN, introduced.

The Earl of Bulloign?

Welcome, brave soldier!

BULLOIGN.

Royal Sir, my errand
Is of such nature as a princely heart,
Sworn with the blood of warlike ancestry,
Will glory to make good. Our valiant Edmund,
Who in this tug of war hath well approved
His noble lineage, and may proudly deem
Canute his glorious peer, hath long in tears
Of blood deplored this desolating strife;
And, even in death, would gladly seal a peace
By his best blood cemented: therefore it is,
(And with no sanguinary, vengeful thought,
Or vain disparagement of Canute's prowess)
He hath commanded me—waving all vantage
The chance of this unequal field allows—
To dare his rival to the mortal lists:
There, hand to hand, as well becomes brave men,
To terminate this quarrel. In such spirit,
Here I fling down his stainless knightly gage.

CANUTE.

My Lord ! my heart leaps to requite your challenge

As its brave bearing well deserves. What say ye,
My Danish men ? Shall we not fitly thus
Purchase triumphant peace ? Nay, nay, good
Turkill,

Obstruct me not—the tide of common blood,
Could that suffice, too freely has been pour'd.
—Eustace of Bulloign, take this glove of mine
Back to your English King ; pledge that to-morrow

The Danish or the Saxon sun shall set.
On our part we appoint Earls Turkill, Gothmund,
And Anlaffe, marshals of the lists.

BULLOIGN.

On ours,

We shall depute Lords Frithegist and Morcar,
And (though scarce worthy of such fellowship)
Myself, poor Eustace Bulloign, brother of England.

CANUTE.

Bulloign, your hand ! I know none worthier.
Farewell !

[Exit BULLOIGN.]

The time, my Lords, 'twixt heaven and me
May be but brief ; which, for our kingdom's
welfare,

And our soul's comfort, must be husbanded.

[*Exeunt* TURKILL, GOTHMUND, &c.

CANUTE.

(*After pacing apart for some time, with hurried step.*)

I thank ye, spirits of my ancestors !

Now look ye down on my aspiring soul,

And make me dreadful as the icy winds

That slay whate'er they breathe upon ! Just
vengeance !

Rush to my heart ! make all my muscles steel—

Keen as my wrongs, as pliant as my will !

Spirit of Odin ! to my life-blood leap—

And with thine ancient terrors light mine eyes,

That with my port I may appal all hearts !—

Thou gory mace ! thou trenchant sword ! twin
ministers

Of fate and glory, to my heart I catch ye—

Fondlier than ever father clasp'd his first-born !

—Ha ! at the touch, the hot blood through my
veins

Rushes like molten metal—Vengeance, thou'rt
mine !

Glory, thou art my mate ! empire, my guerdon !

—Lash thine o'erwearied team, thou sluggish day,

And light me to the goal !—I tread on air !

[*Exit into his tent.*

*The Door of Edmund's Tent. Midnight.*EDMUND (*alone*).

From the dear arms of love I break one moment,
To commune with sad thoughts. Oh king !—
oh slave !

What is the power that thus the popular voice
Can, at a breath, dispel ? The general foe
Was in our grasp ; and now, on one weak arm
The fate of millions must depend : so will
The many, in their blindness. Whence this
weight

Upon my spirit ? That the foe thus dares me,
Should be a triumph ;—long, for it, and vainly
My hot heart sigh'd : yet now it comes, at last,
More like an evil. Some men say, that Fate,
As from a palpable form, casts a true shadow
Down on the victim she pursues : if so,
Even now I need the prayers of holy men.
—How strange, how very strange it is to think
On all the changes of this mortal being,
Standing thus 'neath th' eternal cope of heaven !
Yon zone of stars, whose congregated rays
Distinctly mark an angel pathway through
A wilderness of glory ! this fair earth,

With its enduring features—high-brow'd mountains,
tains,

Bright, beaming lakes that glance 'neath shaggy cliffs,

Rivers that through the bloomy meadows wander,
With their blue-branching veins ; and all those sounds

Of breathing and pervading life :—these, these,
Have an imperishable frame, whose youth

Is bosom'd on eternity :—but we,

Poor fragile atoms ! dust upon the whirlwind !

We are at best but parasitic things :

Moss on the cliff, green ivy on the tower,

The barren mistletoe upon the oak,

The limpet on the tide-wash'd rock, or, meaner,

The insect on the lion's throat, that stings

Yet lives !—

Forgive me, Heaven ! in petulance

I spake, forgetful. Oh ! my wife !—my wife !

How full of bitterness 'tis now to dwell

On what we have been—what thou may'st be,
scarce

Dare I to think. Life was to me, till lately,

A thing I set light thought upon, save only

As yielding paths to fame ; but *thou* hast shown me

Such beauties in its maze, that now I prize it

For thee, perhaps beyond its worth. I tremble,
As a tried warrior should not, when I reflect
How a chance blow may leave thee desolate.
—I must avert my mind from this; nor feign
Pictures to freeze my heart's blood, when th'
occasion
Needs ev'ry pulse.—

Enter BULLOIGN.

BULLOIGN.

The midnight chimes have pass'd,
And the thick-beating tread of preparation
Will soon awake our camp. Your grace already
Anticipates the time.

EDMUND.

My armour?

BULLOIGN.

Bravely

Is burnish'd, and the rivets well-assured.

EDMUND.

By my best hopes! it shames me to have dwelt
On such a thought. Methinks an active frame,
A nimble eye, and a well-practised hand,
Nerved by a fearless heart, are better aids
Than on the cumber'd limbs harness of proof.

BULLOIGN.

Why leave you still that sullen malcontent,

Edric, to sow sedition through our camp?

EDMUND.

I heed him not—it matters not—this day
Shall leave his crook'd fangs venomless : forget
him.

BULLOIGN.

My mind misgives me—

EDMUND.

As does mine : but not
For him, or any mortal thing. Dear Eustace,
I have had secret converse with my heart,
And find that, in its giddy youth, 't has been
Wanting to its Creator. I have thought
On every thing but Heaven !

BULLOIGN.

Now saints forfend !
You wrong yourself, my Lord : I know you better.

EDMUND.

I cannot think the man hath ever lived,
Who in his secret heart abjures his God.
Believe it not :—there may be fops and fools
Who aim at singularity of thought,
(Or to whom nature hath denied all thought ;)
But, that a sentient and reflecting being
Can look round and deny ;—I'll not believe it !
Oh no ! oh no !—Observe the flower—its texture,

Its tints, its odour : see on plains and hills
Harvests more precious than the gold they rival :
Mark the fair fruitage on the leafy tree,
Shading the juicy carpet of the grass :
And, amid all, the bee that booms along
Rejoicing o'er his fragrant task : the small birds
Chirping their nuptial songs beside the nest :
The wild doe, with her fawn, through dim glades
 bounding :

Th' unshackled colt, on the hill-side careering :
Sleek heifers, 'mid the tufted herbs reposing ;
And man, intelligent man, with lordly port,
Stepping, a monarch, o'er his subject realms.
How perfect all in beauty and in use !
Link'd in a chain of mutual dependence—
How various, yet combined in harmony !
How curious each in separate construction !
Yet, in their application, obvious—oh !
How utterly inimitable !——Trust me,
There cannot live the man, who, seeing these,
Bows not in humblest adoration down
To God ;—the great, the wise, the present God !

BULLOIGN.

Mine own dear prince ! it fills my heart with joy
To hear these wholesome words : in these we
 conquer !

EDMUND.

Ah! words are vain—vain, empty air! our deeds
Shall at the last avail us. Good, my brother,
The time is short, which I would dedicate,
Partly, (with heart abased) unto my God,
And partly to those blessed and holy ties
Which he has consecrated. Brother, adieu!

[*They separate. EDMUND retires apart.*

Enter ALGITHA, from the tent.

ALGITHA.

My love!—He's gone. Alas, my fainting soul!
A host of phantoms terrify my brain.
Vainly I chide my self-betraying heart,
And whisper that 't has ever been the lot
Of human greatness to endure this penance.
Oh royalty! thy robe is hemm'd with jewels,
But penitential sackcloth wounds thy skin.
—Vain are these thoughts: I'm but a woman
still—

Whose present joy, whose future hope, is love;
Whose treasury of hoarded thoughts is love;
Whose task, whose duty, whose reward, is love.
—Oh! mine own husband, can I bear to watch
This coming day, when, to thy country's altar,
A victim with thy glories garlanded,

Thou com'st?—and I—even I, poor weeping fool,
Conspire thy ruin: have I not deprived
Thine eyes of rest, with my vain sorrow, sobbing
My weary soul to sleep upon thy bosom,
That still was wakeful in its cares for me?

—But see, where yonder on his knees, bow'd down,
Beneath the starry vault of Heaven, he prays.
His manly front uncover'd and, upraised
In meek devotion—his persuasive lips
Disparted in their breathing piety—
His bright, commanding eye soften'd with feelings
That link him with God's holy ones;—his hands
Folded in patient prayer on his bare breast.
Thou sacred warrior!

I feel an awful hope spring in my bosom,
Caught from the radiance of thy tranced eye:
A deep, religious joy thrills my swoln heart,
As I behold thy plain and manifest converse
With holier worlds than ours!—Thus gazing on
thee,

I feel that I could look even on thy death
Less in despair than hope. I will retire,
And gather all things that he loves, to greet
His homeward eye, and gently minister,
Like a fond, faithful slave, to all his wants.

—Bless thee, my husband! [Exit.

*The Lists.**Crowds of English and Danes, Soldiers and Peasants.*EDRIC (*coming forward*).

Curse on ye all !—Heaven's wrath descend upon ye!

Vile, fickle, heartless minions ! There ye crowd,
And strain, and elbow, and, with dissonant cries,
“ Canute ! ” now “ Edmund ! ” shout upon the
wind,

As each gay pageant, in its bravery,
Supplants its rival. Ay, ye brainless clowns !
Gaze on the show, (albeit, an hour shall dim
Its sheen in gore, dapple its plumes with dust)
As if it were some holiday tournament,
Where, with fond favours stuck upon their crests,
Fair, beardless gallants tilt at female hearts.
That shout again !—my heart is sick—my brain
Reels with this senseless clamour !

Enter CORNWALL.

What from the camp?
The troops—the officers—my native Mercians?—
Does discontent make head?—allegiance falter?

May an old chieftain's voice still challenge sway?
 Can memory of ancient favours still
 Urge on the bold, or paralyze the weak?
 What say ambition, jealousy, hate, fear—
 The fickle, the voluptuous, the feeble?
 Speak!—through my heart and brain a thousand
 passions
 Tumultuous rush.

CORNWALL.

Silence would better suit
 What I have learn'd, and language cannot soften.

EDRIC.

Dare not to trifle—speak!

CORNWALL.

What shall I say?

'Twere better not to speak, than (pardon me)
 To speak, at such a time, unwelcome truths:—
 But, thus it is. There struts not, in yon camp,
 'Mid all their growing discontents, one false
 In his allegiance to the king: and many
 (I grieve to say't) were lavish of dispraise,
 When, though with cautious surmise, I but named
 Your grace's claims and merits; which they noted
 With irony, or most unmanner'd censure.

EDRIC.

Traitor! thou durst not swear it!—by this light,

Which, like a sulphurous fog, deadens my eyes,
And chokes my breath, thou durst not!—Ha?

CORNWALL.

Unhand me!

It is too much, my Lord :—am *I* to blame,
That fate so ill accords with your desires,
Or that your reputation mars your fortunes?

EDRIC.

Ha! ha!—thou dæmon!—I—I—Speak! I
spare thee!

CORNWALL.

Why, what is this?—awake! and be a man!—
Know you no shorter way than plots?—would
blood

Stagger you now?

EDRIC.

Know me, Lord Ethelmar.

I am a man that was not born to blood,
Though circumstance hath train'd my hand to
blood.

I have been wrought upon by dæmons, dragg'd,
Spite of my better nature, to a stake
Where I must combat to the death, with hell
Gaping beneath my foot!—(and hell ne'er bought
A soul more surely lost). Yet, have I dared
More than earth's treasures—power, good fame,
delights,

(Even had I won, as I have lost, all these)
 Could compensate ; and, having stepp'd thus far,
 I will not now abate my will one inch ;
 Though it should lead me on o'er leagues of
 carnage,

Float me in blood, steep me in blackest guilt,
 And plunge me in perdition's deepest gulf.

*[A distant salute of trumpets, shouts, and
 military music.]*

Hark ! heard you not the brazen voice of death
 Peal his wild summons to the feast of blood ?—
 Cornwall ! the hour is come !

The Procession to the Lists.

HERALD.

Ho ! stand aside.

EDRIC (*menacing*).

Slave ! dost not know me ?

CORNWALL.

Stand aside, my Lord,
 And, like the crouch'd wolf, watch your time.

HERALDS.

Keep silence !

[A salute of Trumpets : then,

ENGLISH HERALD.

Know all men ! that Lord Edmund, King of
 England,

Defies unto these lists the King of Danes ;
And, with his good sword, on this field, will
prove him

A false usurper !—so Heaven guard the right !

[*A salute of Trumpets.*]

DANISH HERALD.

Canute, the king, defies to mortal combat,
Edmund of England ; and, within these lists,
Will, in his recreant blood, make good his
cause !

So Heaven advance the bold !

[*The English and Danish troops, with appropriate banners, respectively pass : then grooms, with led horses ; who range themselves at each side. Enter, from different quarters, EDMUND, and CANUTE, completely armed. The former attended by BULLOIGN, FRITHEGIST, and MORCAR ; the latter by TURKILL, GOTHMUND, and ANLAFFE, as joint Marshals of the Lists.*]

SOLDIERY ON EACH SIDE.

“ God save King Edmund ! ”

“ Canute ! Canute ! ” [CANUTE, *steps forward.*]

HERALD.

Silence !—the king would speak.

CANUTE.

To you, Lords, who surround me, ere the trumpet
Summons to horse, I would in brief address me;
Trusting to right my motives in some hearts
Which now mistrust me. That for England's

crown

I stand a bold competitor in arms,
The will of half the noblest of your realm
Shall be my plea: that I was wrought to this
By the sore wrongs wherewith King Ethelred
Assail'd my nation and my house, by all
The violated treaties, broken oaths,
Whereby our earlier vengeance had been stay'd,
I do confess: that I have sundry claims,
Touching the *justice* of this enterprise,
All men know well—most will admit: and,

further,

That, as a victor in so many fields,
I may not yield what faithful hearts have bled for,
To all brave men I make appeal!—Thou, Ed-
mund,

(Whose virtues, and true royalty of soul,
Freely I own, and, owning, hope to win
Much honourable fame in this day's strife,)
Be thou my witness, that I meet thee here
With no malignant passions in my heart,

But with the aspirations of a soldier,
Who with a meet compeer confronted stands,
And knows that one, or both, ere set of sun,
Must die.

EDMUND.

Canute, if thou surviv'st this field,
(Though otherwise I hope) I counsel thee
To put thy trust in action more than words.
With my sword's point I press my arguments.
What ho ! my horse !—we waste the precious
time !

Born to this kingdom, I will die a king !

[English Soldiery shout.]

Long live King Edmund !

EDRIC (*from the side*).

I say, long live——Canute !

[Saxon Soldiers menace, and Danish protect,

EDRIC.

EDMUND (*interposing*).

Hold back ! disperse !—Canute, call off your
ban-dogs

That threat me thus.—Brave English gentlemen,
Unhand that madman : by my heart, he is not
Worthy a brave man's vengeance ! Traitor, be-
gone !

Thou sav'dst my life once ; take thine own : th'
account

Is balanced:—look that you forget it not.

[Both Kings, at the trumpet-signal, mount their chargers, and, attended by their respective suites, proceed towards the inner part of the lists, passing under a triumphal archway.]

CORNWALL.

What tempted you, my Lord, to that wild sally?

EDRIC.

It matters not. Look, and report what passes.

CORNWALL.

You spared his life—

EDRIC.

Look to the lists.

CORNWALL.

He now

Spares yours—

EDRIC (*impatiently*).

The lists, I say!

CORNWALL.

Yet taunts you gravely.

EDRIC.

I'm dangerous!—tempt me not.

CORNWALL.

He bids you note

That the account is balanced.

EDRIC.

I shall remember!

No more: look forth, and say—what of the lists?

CORNWALL.

This is a scene, my Lord, that all men crowd to
With hungry eyes, that may not be appeased:
Why shrinks your eye, alone, from marking it?

EDRIC.

Search not my heart: it is inscrutable
Even to myself.

CORNWALL.

It seems to me, thus gazing
Upon your hollow eyes and sallow cheeks,
Sparkling and spotted with contending passions—

EDRIC.

What am I fallen to?—Be silent! Darest thou
Thus to dissect my mind, and measure me,
As if I were some idle prodigy,
For fools' lips to descant on? Say that I hate
This man, and will not look on his chance
triumph—

Say that 'tis envy, and these plaudits writhe me
Like serpent hisses, ere the sting be felt—
Say that 'tis weakness, madness, folly, dotage—
Say—what you will—I care not!

CORNWALL (*suddenly*).

Lo! they burst

The barrier—and the rushing waves of armour
Flash onward—a bright cataract of heroes !
There springs the King—by Heaven ! th' Arch-
angel Michael

Look'd not more terrible to Satan ! See him—
As borne upon some courser of the elements,
Whose light ethereal limbs sport on the air,
Making the winds they paw their well-known
paths

From which to spring ! With what a graceful ease
The royal Edmund sits ! his snowy plumes
Surging, like crested billows, to each bound
Of the wild charger ; and his jewell'd mail,
As, with true knightly skill, his supple form
Sways to the motion, glancing in the sun
Like rippling waters, or the morning dew-drops
Upon a mountain thorn ! Hark ! those glad
shouts

With which the royal presence is saluted !
What flight of bonnets leaping on the air !
What press of banners sweeping the green grass !
What throng of streaming scarfs waved by fair
hands !

And now, with graceful courtesy, he doffs
His threat'ning casque, and loosens o'er his
shoulders

A flood of golden curls—glorious, by Heaven !

EDRIC.

'Sdeath, what a coil of bootless sound is here!

CORNWALL.

And see! with scornful toss, he flings away
His helm, disdainful of its aid; first lifting
Its regal circlet, which on his fair brow .
He plants, and looks round on the throng, as one
Who, or in life or death, will be a king!

EDRIC.

The Dane!—Hast no eye for Canute?

CORNWALL.

I note him

Firm in his seat, like a collected soldier,
Stepping his sinewy, well-managed steed
Along th' elastic turf; whose gather'd haunches,
Arch'd, bridling neck, and keen protruded ears,
Mark his impatient vigour for the charge.
Canute right nobly, as a tried knight, bears him.
So steadily, with such an upright port,
(Resting his glaived hand on his ample thigh,
And his brows shadow'd by his raven crest,)
He spans his well-mail'd charger, it were surely
No figure of the fancy to name both,
Like the famed Centaur, but one animal.

[*The trumpets sound.*

EDRIC.

The trump! the trump!

CORNWALL.

They spring upon each other !

EDRIC (*with a rush forward*).

Who falls?—By heaven ! by hell ! the Dane is
down.

CORNWALL.

Dismiss your fears—King Edmund flings away
His fortunes with his lance. He leaps to earth !
And, with drawn sword, assaults the wary Dane.
Ha ! he gives way—retreating, step by step—

EDRIC.

Death ! who gives way ?

CORNWALL.

Canute. He aims no blow ;
But parries the hot onset with fix'd eye.
Hark ! you may hear their clashing swords ;
they now
Approach so near.

[A tumultuous crowd rushes in, shouting.

“ An Edmund ! ”—“ A Canute ! ”

[Through the crowd an open space is formed.

CANUTE, *faint and exhausted*, enters
fighting with EDMUND, who presses him
vigorously.

EDMUND.

Dost thou renounce thy claim ? Crav'st thou for
life ?

CANUTE.

Strike on !

EDMUND.

May Heaven accept thy valiant soul,
Which thus I speed !

[*He strikes CANUTE down, shattering his sword.*]

Wilt yield ? Canute, submit,
And I will spare thy life.

CANUTE.

Strike, once again !

Strike at my throat !

EDMUND (*turning from him*).

No ! Take another sword.

CANUTE.

By Heaven ! I hate thee more for this disdain
Than for thy prowess, Edmund ! Oh for ven-
geance !

Oh for a valiant arm, bravely to rid me
Of this foul shame ! Ay, I would raise that arm
And head, above his proudest peers !

EDRIC (*approaching CANUTE*).

What said'st thou ?
Say that once more, fair prince ; but once again.

CANUTE.

Thou tempt'st me—hence !

EDRIC (*muttering*).

Enough—I comprehend.

EDMUND.

Canute! betake thee to thy sword—I wait!

EDRIC (*aside drawing his dagger*).

Now, fatal steel, come forth! and let me carve,
With thy most trenchant edge, one pathway yet
Towards Hope's lost beacon. Thus let me clutch
thy haft!

Vengeance make keen mine eye! Hate nerve my
arm!

[*He joins a group of Danes, towards whom,
in the combat, CANUTE is again beaten
back. As EDMUND aims a blow, EDRIC,
over the shoulder of a Dane, stabs him.*

EDMUND.

Treason! ho, treason!—Some base hand hath
stabb'd me!

BULLOIGN.

My prince!—Alas! his lips grow white—the
blood

Spouts forth in torrents! Lean on me.

EDMUND (*faintly*).

Once more

Let me look on my Alghitha—my moments—
Are number'd—haste! my heart's sick—haste!

ALGITHA *rushes in.*

VOICES FROM THE CROWD.

The Queen!

The Queen!—Make way!

ALGITHA.

Where is he? where?—my husband?

[*Seeing, and flinging her arms round him.*

Ah! thou art slain—my love! my life!—my all!

I will not leave thee! tear me not hence, hard
men!

EDMUND.

This hurt is slight—my love—a scratch. I shall
Be better—quite well—presently.

ALGITHA.

Alas!

Thou art dying—see—see—he grows pale—some
help!

His eyes swim. Savages!—will none bring aid?
Help—help! he bleeds to death.

EDMUND (*apart to BULLOIGN*).

Gently remove her—

This sight will kill her—take her away.

(*To ALGITHA*). Nay, see

How strong I am!

[*He endeavours to walk past her.*

Oh ! I am faint—your hand—
We meet—again—in heaven—farewell—I—die !
[*He falls suddenly to the ground.* ALGITHA
faints on the body.

CANUTE.

What villain hand hath done this deed ? Stand
back !

[*All retreat except EDRIC, who stands moodily
alone.*

Behold the wretch ! and, witness of his crime,
The fratricidal steel, reeking with gore !
Seize him ! What, not a word ?—art stupified ?

EDRIC (*starting*).

How's this ? What have I done ? Unhand me,
Sirs !

[*He shrinks on seeing the body.*

Yes, yes—I see it all—enough—too much—
I could not do't again, though all earth's glories
Sprang round my path like weeds ! What mean
you ? Ho !

Canute ! your pledge—release me from these
dogs.

Off, ye base curs ! thus do I spurn ye ! thus !
King, for whose glory I have staked my all
On earth, in heaven—here and hereafter—hear
me !

Your pledge, great king, your pledge !

CANUTE.

Eternal justice!

What have my passions utter'd ! Be it so.
To you, my Lords, I here commit this wretch,
This fell, anticipating slave of sin,
Who dogs the steps of passion, and outstrips
The transient purpose of the hurried thought,
Moulding to crime the visions of despair.
Thou *shalt* surmount thy peers. Upon yon tower
Set up a pole, higher than ever steeple
Rear'd its sky-piercing vane ; and, on its summit,
Ere yet with hurrying foot one hour hath pass'd,
Transfix his head ! Traitor ! away with him !

EDRIC.

Canute ! for mercy !—Give me but a week—
A day—an hour, one precious hour, to shrive
My sinful soul ! Bring me a confessor !
Not that way—no—not that—! See ! his eyes
stare—

And in each stony ball a dæmon sits,
Looking damnation on me. Ho ! King Edmund !
If thou art living, speak !—Canute, protect me !
Spare me—I am not fit to die—the fiends
Already pluck at me—I am not fit
To die !—crush not my soul—one moment's
mercy—

I would repent! Oh agony! oh devils!

[He staggers beneath their strokes.]

Spare me—oh spare!—I—I—am choked—with
blood—

A sea of blood boils o'er my lip.—Avaunt!

[He creeps to the body of EDMUND.]


Edmund—my brother!—pardon—thy murderer.

Plead for me—plead for me—where—thou art
gone—

And I—never—— *[He falls dead on the body.]*

ODE
ON THE MARRIAGE OF EDMUND AND
ALGITHA.

THE following Poem was written for the Masque in the Fourth Part. As I consider that it would overload that scene, I have withdrawn it thence, and place it here, as an appendage to a Drama, to the business of which it bears a reference.

HEN the golden-sandall'd sun,
From his rose-curtain'd chamber of
the East,
Steps with a smiling face, as, from the feast
Of Love, young Hymen bounds into the light,
With eyes still dewy bright;
Around his car the swift-wing'd sisterhood,
The downy-slipper'd Hours
(Their daily task begun),
Float in harmonious dance; while their young
brood,
The Moments, like bright sparks, or glancing
flowers,
Winnow their scented wings. Before his path,

Those dark-brow'd ministers of wrath,
 The gloomy night-clouds, o'er the horizon's verge
 Scatter their voiceless tempests : not a sound
 Of sorrow murmurs through the deep profound ;
 But pleasure-breathing echoes scale the skies,
 And love's seductive melodies.
 From the green woods emerge
 The feathered choristers, whose rapturous hymn
 First greets the Cherubim,
 When from the morning-star lingering they lean,
 As loath to leave so beautiful a scene.

Resplendent Phœbus ! how thy glories spread,
 Floating abroad from thy most awful head !
 Dispersing through the air
 Light from thy beautiful dishevell'd hair,
 As though it were some essence, subtly shed,
 Pervading, like a perfume : or as the dreams
 Which, in her all-sufficient power, bright Fancy
 Sheds through the mind with her undying beams,
 Fancy—who has her fold in every heart,
 And may not thence depart ;
 Whose home is in each haunted shade,
 Beneath the woody mountain,
 Or by the rocky fountain ;
 Whose form is loveliest on the green earth lapp'd,

Whose holiest thoughts in the blue heavens are
 wrapp'd :

A wanderer through eternity—a maid
 Of fearless port—a very faery queen !
 Of restless eye and ever-changing mien ;
 With all her wing'd ideas fluttering round,
 That spring from every varied scene,
 And float on every stream of sound,
 As flow'rets sprang where Venus touch'd the
 ground.

Herald of glory ! soul-reviving Sun !
 The dewy earth from her glad altars steams
 Exhaustless incense to thy worshipping'd beams :
 And, ere thy task be done,
 The germinating soil sends up to thee
 A thankful progeny—
 Fair flowers, kind fruits, fresh grass, the precious
 grain,
 A lavish birth, that never teems in vain ;
 And the great increase that the boon air yields ;
 And the empastured fields ;
 And the unfathom'd main.

Thou Soul of this material universe !—
 Offspring confest of Heaven !—Parent of
 Earth !—

Fountain of Hope!—pardon that we rehearse
 (In strains so little worth)
 Thy glories and our worship : pardon that we,
 In our idolatry,
 Dare to make thee—great Type of all !—on our
 Weak lips the type of earthly, mortal power :
 And, while we kneel thus at a human shrine,
 Bowing, as weakness will to strength, as duty
 To a loved master, as fond hearts to beauty
 Almost divine,
 That we, with ceaseless prayer,
 Beseech high Heaven to this illustrious pair
 To grant a long career, brilliant as thine,
 As fraught with power, as redolent of joy,
 As full of hope, as loved without alloy,
 As prosperously fruitful ; and, at last,
 As mourn'd when their decaying light hath past !

THE END.

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JUN 23 1953